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EKONOMI OCH SAMHÄLLE

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IMAGE HERITAGE  
*THE TEMPORAL DIMENSION IN CONSUMERS'  
CORPORATE IMAGE CONSTRUCTIONS*



SWEDISH SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION, FINLAND

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ANNE RINDELL

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IMAGE CONSTRUCTIONS

Helsinki 2007

## Image Heritage: The Temporal Dimension in Consumers' Corporate Image Constructions

Key words: Image, image heritage, corporate image, corporate brand image, corporate image management, corporate brand management, retailing, grounded theory

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## PREFACE

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## CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1.	Background .....	1
1.2.	Images as a research arena .....	5
1.2.1.	Perspectives within image research .....	5
1.2.2.	The temporal dimension within image research .....	10
1.3.	Research problem.....	14
1.4.	Purpose of the study .....	17
1.5.	Limitations.....	18
1.6.	Paradigmatic, methodological and empirical considerations .....	20
1.6.1.	Grounded theory as a methodology .....	21
1.6.2.	Empirical context .....	23
1.7.	The structure of the thesis .....	24
2	LITERATURE REVIEW OF CORPORATE IMAGE RESEARCH ....	27
2.1.	Introduction .....	29
2.2.	Discussion of the definitions for image and brand.....	31
2.3.	Consumer-focused views within corporate image research .....	38
2.3.1.	State-oriented views .....	39
2.3.2.	Process-oriented views.....	42
2.3.2.1.	Image meanings and image relationships .....	44
2.3.2.2.	Social and cultural approaches of image research .....	47
2.3.3.	Summary on consumer-focused image research.....	49
2.4.	Organization-focused views on corporate images.....	50
2.4.1.	Conceptual developments and schools of thought.....	50
2.4.2.	Basic logic, key viewpoints, and core concepts .....	53
2.4.2.1.	Identity and identity mix .....	55
2.4.2.2.	Reputation vs. reputation management.....	63
2.4.2.3.	Corporate branding .....	64
2.5.	Summary and conclusions.....	66
3	GROUNDED THEORY FOR STUDYING IMAGE CONSTRUCTIONS.....	71
3.1.	Evolutionary developments in grounded theory .....	71
3.2.	The research process in grounded theory .....	73

3.3. The research process in the conducted study .....	74
3.3.1. The research question.....	74
3.3.2. Data collection .....	75
3.3.2.1. First study.....	77
3.3.2.2. Second study .....	79
3.3.2.3. Third study .....	79
3.3.2.4. Fourth study .....	80
3.3.2.5. Fifth study .....	80
3.3.2.6. Coding the material.....	81
3.3.3. Data analysis in the present study .....	81
3.3.4. Empirical context in the present study .....	83
3.4. Reliability and validity of the conducted study.....	86
<b>4 CONSUMERS' IMAGE CONSTRUCTIONS AND THE TEMPORAL DIMENSION THEREIN .....</b>	<b>92</b>
4.1. Open phase: Pre-understanding of image constructions .....	93
4.1.1. Multiple, separated and contradictive images with a temporal dimension .....	94
4.1.2. Emergent categories and properties through comparison .....	99
4.1.3. Summary and choice of core category .....	114
4.2. The selective phase: Temporal dimension in consumers' image constructions	124
4.2.1. Awareness time span.....	124
4.2.1.1. Earliest memories as the starting point of the consumer's awareness time span.....	125
4.2.1.2. "'Now' as the end point of the awareness time span .....	129
4.2.2. Temporal focus for image constructions.....	130
4.2.2.1. Single versus multiple temporal foci .....	133
4.2.3. Content of image constructions over time .....	135
4.2.3.1. Consumers narrating the past.....	135
4.2.3.2. Sources for image constructions over time .....	140
4.2.3.3. Perspectives for image constructions.....	142
4.2.3.4. Feelings and emotions over time .....	144
4.2.3.5. Summary on the content in image constructions .....	149
4.2.4. Comparing as a way to depict, specify and construct images.....	149
4.2.5. How images change .....	151
4.2.6. Summary on the temporal dimension in consumers' corporate image constructions .....	156

4.3. Theoretical phase: comparing findings with existing theory .....	157
4.4. The emerged view on consumer constructed corporate images and image heritage .....	161
5 DISCUSSION .....	166
5.1. Theoretical discussion .....	166
5.1.1. Conclusions, theoretical implications and contributions of the study .....	167
5.2. Methodological discussion .....	177
5.2.1. Conclusions, methodological implications and contributions of the study .....	178
5.3. The managerial perspective of the study .....	180
5.3.1. Conclusions, managerial implications and contribution .....	180
5.4. Suggestions for further research .....	184
REFERENCES .....	187

## TABLES

Table 1 Selected definitions on corporate images .....	35
Table 2 Definitions on corporate identity by selected authors .....	59
Table 3 Data coding system used in this study .....	81
Table 4 Anttila's slogans .....	84
Table 5 Open-coding and preliminary categories and properties .....	96
Table 6 Emergent categories, properties and dimensions from the first study .....	110
Table 7 Awareness time spans .....	128

## FIGURES

Figure 1 Perspectives within image research .....	6
Figure 2 Positioning the study within image research .....	16
Figure 3 Fields of research the study contributes to .....	18



Figure 4	Overall research process and reasoning in the present study .....	23
Figure 5	Structure of the thesis in relation to the research process.....	26
Figure 6	New model of corporate communication: interactivity and multiple message sources (Cornelissen 2000, 121) .....	43
Figure 7	Dimensions of identity (Higgins 1987, in Urde 1999, 129).....	45
Figure 8	Historiography on concepts used within corporate image research internationally and in Finnish business context (Modified and developed based on Balmer and Greyser 2003) .....	52
Figure 9	Key organization-focused viewpoints in corporate image research.....	54
Figure 10	Dimensions of identity extended with a temporal dimension (Developed based on Higgins 1987, Urde 1999, Puusa 2007) .....	57
Figure 11	Helen Stuart's model of the corporate identity management process (Stuart 1999, 205).....	62
Figure 12	Interplay between identity and image (modified from Hatch and Schultz 2002).....	66
Figure 13	Data collection in the present study.....	76
Figure 14	Overview of Laura's image constructions.....	95
Figure 15	Overview of Sanna's image constructions .....	100
Figure 16	Overview of Mikko's image constructions of the main Anttila .....	102
Figure 17	Overview of Mikko's image constructions of 'Kodin Anttila' .....	103
Figure 18	Overview of Vepa's image constructions of Anttila .....	106
Figure 19	Overview of Jorma's image constructions .....	108
Figure 20	Overview on Eine's image constructions .....	109
Figure 21	Estimations of the awareness time spans and temporal foci in the exploratory study .....	116
Figure 22	Relationships between emergent categories in the explorative study. ....	122

Figure 23 Emerged pre-understanding of consumers' corporate image constructions.	123
Figure 24 Awareness time spans.....	130
Figure 25 Temporal foci for image constructions.....	132
Figure 26 Single versus multiple temporal foci.....	134
Figure 27 Sources for image constructions.....	141
Figure 28 Change in informants' image constructions.....	151
Figure 29 Summary on image constructions .....	162
Figure 30 The consumer's image construction process.....	163
Figure 31 Image heritage and its components in relation to the company's history ....	164
Figure 32 Temporal focus gap between the company and the consumer .....	173
Figure 33 The interplay between image heritage and identity.....	174
Figure 34 The contribution of the study .....	175
Figure 35 Future branding strategies .....	176

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Since the 1950's, images and brands have been topics of great interest in both academia and practice. Various aspects of the topic have inspired both academic research and practitioners, either focusing on the company or the consumer. The present study focuses on the consumer, and on how consumers construct corporate images. Based on an empirical study with a grounded theory approach, the findings indicated that *consumers' corporate images are constructed through dynamic relational processes based on a multifaceted network of earlier images from multiple sources over time.*

However, despite the wide range of theories and models within the field of research, the temporal dimension in consumers' corporate images has been little studied, despite being frequently referred to both implicitly and explicitly. The present study fills that gap and introduces the concept of *image heritage*. The concept *image heritage stands for the consumer's earlier company-related experiences from multiple sources over time activated for interpreting company-related experiences in the present.*

Based on the empirical study, the conclusion is drawn that consumers' corporate images are constructed as dynamic relational processes in which the past, present and future are interconnected. Additionally, consumers' corporate images may change, but they change in relation to all available sources over time, of which the company is but one.

This introductory chapter begins with an overview of image as a research arena within marketing; herein no distinctions are made between the levels of image research (e.g. product- and company-level). This distinction is motivated by the consumer-focus taken in the study as for the consumer "image is a reality" (Bernstein 1984, preface). Thereafter, the research gap, the research problem, the purpose and limitations of the study are presented. The chapter ends with a discussion on the paradigmatic, methodological and empirical considerations as well as a presentation of the structure of the thesis.

## 1.1. Background

In response to competitive pressure and the desire to be recognized and supported, corporations invest millions every year to strengthen their corporate images and reputations. Led by the best strategic thinking on the matter, business managers select those attributes of the organization that are unique, authentic, and non-imitable, and look for alluring ways to project this image to the outside world as into the hearts and minds of their own employees (Hatch & Schultz 2004, 1).

These words by two prominent organizational identity researchers represent a starting point and set the scene for the present study, focusing on how consumers<sup>1</sup> construct corporate images over time.

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<sup>1</sup> The word consumer is used throughout the thesis as a general term to denote "the one who is constructing his/her corporate images." Hence, no distinction is made based on the relationship (e.g., customer, stakeholder group) the consumer has with the company.

Strong<sup>2</sup> product brands and company names have been around throughout the 20th century (Aaker 1996), and the company's image, recently more often called the corporate brand (Balmer & Greyser 2003), has been named as one of the company's most valuable marketing assets (Dowling 2002). Nowadays, the notions of images, identities, and brands are gaining renewed attention among scholars and managers (Christensen & Askegaard 2001) as it has been recognized that "brands have direct and clear links with money, value and profitability" (Olins 2005, 208). To illustrate, Jez Frampton emphasizes in the foreword for Best Global Brands for 2006 that "it is now common knowledge that branding is fundamental to business success" (Business week, Internet<sup>3</sup>). Not only do companies invest millions in brands, brands also represent a monetary asset for the company. For example the Nokia brand, which represents both the company and its products is ranked in the afore mentioned publication as the 6<sup>th</sup> most valuable brand in the world, is considered to be worth more than \$30 billion.

As products and services are sold to a large extent by the product's own or the company's image (Kunde 2002), many scholars have argued that corporate images should be considered as a strategic question in the organization that should be taken care of by the company executives (see Temporal & Alder 1998; Vos 2000; Alessandri 2001; Balmer 2001; Dowling 2002; Schultz, Antorini et al. 2005). Especially within the service sector, where corporate images play an important role in building consumer relationships, corporate images are emphasized to be a strategic issue (Berry 2000). However, recently Vargo and Lusch (2004) and Grönroos (2005; 2007) have argued that all companies can be regarded as service companies, which additionally emphasizes the strategic nature of corporate images.

The importance of images is additionally pinpointed by the branding literature, suggesting that especially in contemporary, increasingly turbulent, mature and hence competitive markets strong brand images create trust, stability and differentiation (Grace & O'Cass 2005; Kay 2006) for all stakeholder groups, both internally and externally.

Consistent use and exposure of corporate attributes chosen by the management, which describe and differentiate the company, are widely believed to affect the public's image of the corporation (Alessandri 2001). Clearly it is assumed that company actions not only affect, but also steer the public's image of the corporation, a perspective revealed by the notion of *building or managing* corporate images.

All in all, the field of corporate image research has been in focus since the 1950's, and for example, Martineau's seminal article "The image of a retail store" (1958) revealed that a favorable image provides an organization with a distinctive competitive advantage (in Balmer & Greyser 2003). Thus, since the 1950's, it has been recognized that corporate images are a source of revenue for the company. On product level,

---

<sup>2</sup> Aaker does not give any definition or specification on what a strong brand is or when a brand is strong but in his overview on the history of the Kodak brand, which he refers to as a strong brand, he concludes that "the Kodak story shows how brand equity can be created and managed" (Aaker, 1996, 7). Hence, if not synonymous concepts, at least the concept of strong brands and brand equity are somehow related to each other. However, Kotler and Keller point out that "all companies strive to build brand strength – that is, strong, favourable, and unique brand image" (Kotler & Keller, 2005, 25).

<sup>3</sup> [www.businessweek.com](http://www.businessweek.com) visited 15.10.2006

Gardner and Levy (1955) in their seminal article emphasized that a product's brand is important for purchase choice but that a brand name is more than the label employed to differentiate among the manufacturers of a product. It is a complex symbol that represents a variety of ideas and attributes the consumer has built up and acquired of it as a public object over a period of time. Therefore, since the 1950's it has also been recognized that the brand image is "in the eye of the beholder" (Christensen & Askegaard 2001) on all levels of images. Moreover, Gardner and Levy (1955) recognized that consumer constructed images have a temporal dimension as they are constructed over a period of time.

However, recently and after years of conceptual work, Abratt and Mofokeng (2001) express maturity within corporate branding:

From an academic point of view, there has been much work on the development of models and processes recently.... While there is now a clear theoretical understanding of how companies develop their corporate image, there is a need to test these from a management and practitioner point of view (2001, 368)

Accordingly, Grace and O'Cass (2002) emphasize that corporate branding models have been developed based on practitioners' views which lack empirical testing. Based on a recent literature study, Kay (2006) points out that within the field, it is not yet clear how strong corporate brands can effectively be developed or even used by management. In line with the latter authors' critique, Schultz (2006) argues that what have been put forth so far are mainly opinions based on case studies on how organizations should act and what should be taken into consideration in corporate branding, but with little substance. In a nutshell, corporate identity, corporate image, corporate brand and corporate reputation can be classified as concepts that have captured an enduring interest, but relatively little systematic empirical research (Cornelissen & Elving 2003). Much effort has been put in defining and redefining the concepts (for an overview, see e.g. Balmer, 2001; Balmer & Greyser 2003; Brown et al, 2006) and on modeling the management processes of them (for an overview, see, Bick, Jacobson et al. 2003). These management focused models have, however, seldom been grounded on subjectivist consumer research on image construction processes, rather they are grounded on the view that the image to a large extent can be controlled by the company and studied as a mirror-reflection of the corporate brand strategy.

However, image, brand and reputation have their roots in the same underpinnings, and as Pitt et al (2006) point out, the concepts corporate brand, corporate identity, corporate image and corporate reputation are "frequently used synonymously and interchangeably, and at other times to signify very different constructs" (2006, 122). Especially the use of the term 'brand' is often ubiquitous to the extent that the idea expressed is at times diluted. Originally image and reputation both were in the eye of the beholder, whereas corporate identity represented the communicator's perspective of corporate image management (Gray & Balmer 1998). Today, branding is generally used to depict the company's image building strategies and activities, with the underpinnings that the brand meaning among consumers largely equates with the company's view.

Pitt et al (2006) have broadened the view from solely a communication view to including all company actions and suggest that *corporate brand* should be used as an umbrella concept encompassing corporate identity, corporate image and corporate

reputation, which should be conceived as more or less open bundles of association, consistent across various constituents (management, employees, or stakeholders), context and perspectives (Pitt et al., 2006). Another attempt to cover the field with one umbrella concept, *strategic marketing*, has been introduced by Balmer and Greyser (2003), referring to a future interdisciplinary arena of corporate level image and brand research, including the concepts image, reputation, identity, communication, and brand. However, no consensus has been reached on how to call this specific field of research<sup>4</sup>, focusing on how the company is perceived by the consumer and what actions, if any, are there to be taken to influence the consumer's interpretations.

As the present study takes a consumer view on corporate images, and considering the conceptual confusion within the focal field of literature and research, for reasons of clarity and from here on in the thesis, *corporate image research* is used as the umbrella term for both organization- and consumer-focused concepts and research, aiming to understand how consumers construct corporate images and what a company can or should do to influence the consumers' image construction processes in favorable ways from the company's own perspective. This choice is done in accordance with Grunig's (1993) suggestion to use *image* as the umbrella term for all company activities and their effects between an organization and its constituencies on how the company is perceived in the market. *Identity* and *branding* are concepts used in the thesis when referring to the company and its "image and brand building or managing" activities and processes, whereas *corporate brand and image*, *corporate brand meaning* and *corporate brand relationships* are used when referring to the consumer and his/her corporate image, meaning or relationship constructing processes. This distinction is made although it is recognized that all the mentioned concepts de facto are based on mental associations. It is to be noticed that in the thesis, brand and image are used synonymously and interchangeably due to the consumer-focus taken. It is also pointed out that the vocabulary used herein refers to concepts various authors use in their original texts. As a conclusion, *image* is the core concept in the thesis for understanding corporate level images, both from an organizational and consumer perspective.

In sum, corporate images are important monetary assets for companies, but we do not yet have a comprehensive theory or understanding of how corporate images are constructed in the consumers' minds or why some corporate brand images succeed and others don't. Knowledge of consumers' information processing, mental storage, feelings and emotions are scant (Schultz 2006) while at the same time the consumer is increasingly being ascribed a central and more active role than that of a passive recipient of the organization's messages and products (Antorini & Andersen 2005). Considering these factors, there is a need for consumer-focused research within corporate image research with the aim to understand how consumers construct corporate images, and especially, to relate this new information to existing corporate branding models. The present study is consumer-focused with the aim to contribute to filling that gap through new understanding on how consumers construct corporate images.

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<sup>44</sup> Balmer (2003) discusses the use of concepts within the field in the prologue of the book '*Revealing the corporation*': "There is another indictment of those who are concerned with these corporate level concepts – namely, the magnetism of monomania. As a consequence, one concept is held in particular affection at any one point in time. Currently, the lure of the corporate brand is hold sway." (2003, 1)

Next, two major perspectives in the focal image research arena will be introduced.

## **1.2. Images as a research arena**

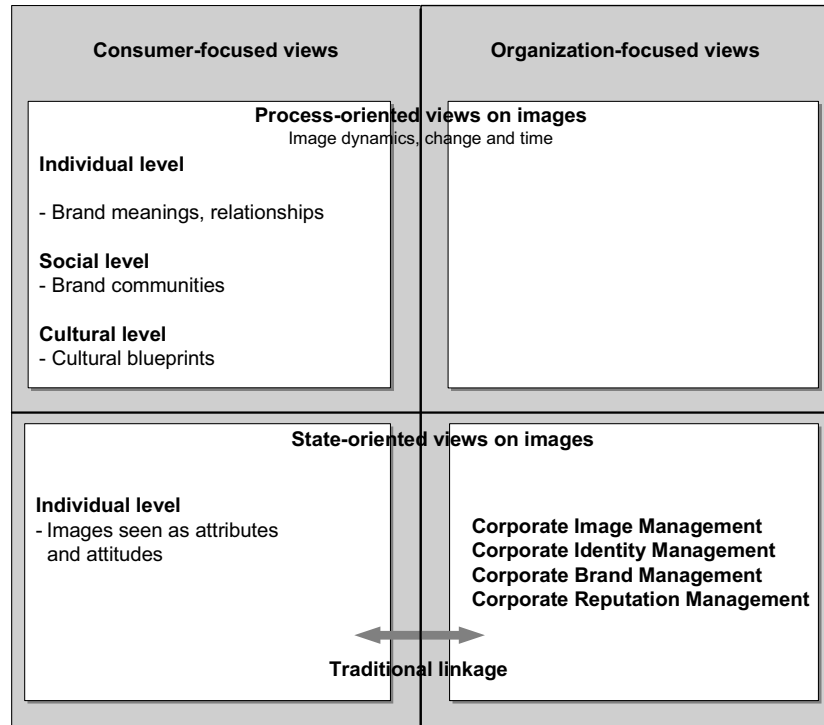
In this section, the two major perspectives within image research will be discussed and how the temporal dimension within the literature has been considered within these perspectives.

Similarly, Lannon and Cooper (1983) argued in their seminal paper that the fundamental question “what does advertising do to people?” may be challenged by the question “what do people do with advertising?,” likewise the fundamental question within image research “what does branding do to people?” can be challenged by “what do people do with brands?” Based on these two approaches, different perspectives of image research have developed.

### ***1.2.1. Perspectives within image research***

As an overview, several strands of relevant corporate identity, corporate brand, corporate image and corporate reputation management literature can be divided into two overall research streams (see e.g. de Chernatony & Dall'Omo Riley 1999; Bengtsson & Östberg 2006) based on the consumer-focus taken:

- (1) The conventional organization-focused research tradition in which a management-oriented view on brands, images, identities and reputation as an organizational tool, is taken, and
- (2) The consumer-focused research tradition, focusing on the consumer or individual, social, and cultural level. The tradition attempts to understand how consumers think about and respond to brands (see Fournier & Yao 1997; Grace & O'Cass 2002).



**Figure 1 Perspectives within image research**

In the “conventional” (Thompson & Tambyah 1998) management-oriented and organization-focused view, a normative, managerial interest is often taken with the assumption that the company can to a large extent control the image, as defined by the organization (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000), as planned and integrated communication over different media is seen as driving and building images. The image becomes a projection of the identity, which was decided by the management (Bengtsson & Östberg 2006), and consequently, when the image is measured, it mirrors the identity that was decided by the management. Hence, images are seen both as mirroring identity, and as identification of the organization.

The development within the conventional organization-focused view has been characterized by Schultz and his colleagues, as being divided into two camps: the tactical and visually-oriented view and the strategic and integration-oriented view (Schultz, Antorini et al. 2005). In the present thesis the strategic approach on corporate image research is followed.

As the managerial implications given can be concluded to be consistency and coherence in orchestrating all of the company’s image building activities (Fill, 2006), “a huge amount of checklists and matrices has been produced to guide companies in building strong brands” (Bengtsson & Östberg 2006, 11).



On the corporate level, corporate branding is seen as a strategic competitive tool and it is the management's task to define a corporate brand identity that is competitive and profitable, and delivers value to consumers, thus influencing their behavior in a positive way from the company's perspective. Brands are seen as the identity and identification of an entity, as can be illustrated by how the American Marketing Association defines brands:

A name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies the seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers'. The legal term for brand is trademark. A brand may identify one item, family of items, or all items of that seller. If used for a firm as a whole, the preferred term is trade name (The American Marketing Association, homepage, Internet).<sup>5</sup>

The ubiquity of brands, referring both to the company and the consumer, can be noticed in Moore's (2003) suggestion of what a brand is: "a name and a logo, joined to a set of regimented associations, with source-identifying indexical" (Moore, 2003, 339). However, the other extreme, pointing at brands as merely subjective perceptions is expressed by Fournier (1998): "the brand has no objective existence at all: it is simply a collection of perceptions held in the mind of the consumer" (Fournier 1998, 345).

Within the conventional organization-focused view, long held beliefs and much research on corporate images have been grounded on the assumption that corporate images are managed, created and controlled by the organization (Williams & Moffitt 1997). Controversially, however, many scholars within the genre define image "to be in the eye of the beholder" (Christensen & Askegaard 2001), and the consumer's personal conceptual "filters" have been supposed to steer the way he or she reacts to information (Krone 1987). Additionally, the consumer is seen as a passive receiver of the company's branding activities and research has focused mainly on behavioral and/or cognitive aspects of consumer images (Cornelissen 2000; Bengtsson & Östberg 2006). To illustrate, The American Marketing Associations defines brand images as:

The perception in the minds of persons. The brand image is a mirror reflection (though perhaps inaccurate) of the brands personality or product being. It is what people believe about a brand – their thoughts, feelings and expectations. (The American Marketing Associations homepage, Internet)<sup>6</sup>

Thus, it is assumed that there is only one brand image and it reflects company actions.

More recently, however, other aspects have been put forth in which images of one individual never equal that of another (Gray & Balmer 1998; Balmer & Greyser 2003), and that there is a multiplicity of images Nguyen & LeBlanc, (2001) depending on the perceptions of each specific stakeholder group and type of experiences as well as the contacts they have had with the company (Dowling 2002). In conclusion, from the company's perspective, the images are there whether the company likes it or not (Dowling 2002), and they seem not to be controlled by the company to the extent that has been assumed. On the contrary, Grönroos (2000) has emphasized that it is the consumer who controls the meaning of the image.

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<sup>5</sup> [www.marketingpower.com](http://www.marketingpower.com), visited 24.5.2007

<sup>6</sup> [www.marketingpower.com](http://www.marketingpower.com), visited 24.5.2007

During the 21<sup>st</sup> century the borders between stakeholder-groups have, however, began to blur. It has been recognized that one consumer may have multiple roles in relation to a company and insight into the company from many perspectives (Schultz, Hatch et al. 2000), which indicate multiple images on the individual level, but questions to what extent a company can rely on stereotyped group images.

Despite the frequent use of the image concept within the research tradition, Balmer and Greyser (2003) emphasize difficulties in its usage. For example, images are for companies difficult or impossible to control; there is a multiplicity of images, and different images affect different stakeholder groups, which, they suggest is the reason that lately the concepts *brand* and *reputation* have become more popular (Balmer & Greyser 2003). From a theoretical, and especially managerial, point of view, it is difficult to see how changing one concept to another would solve the problem of understanding how company actions influence the consumer's images, brand or reputation construction processes. As Brown, Dacin et al. (2006) extensive analysis on the key concepts and existing terminology show, all concepts used within the field are based on mental associations, and the difficulties within the field are due to this specific point, we do not yet know enough about how people think, as Brown (1998) pointed out already some time ago. Olins (2005, 208), on the other hand, has emphasized that within consultancy and from a practitioner's perspective, using the concept 'brand' synonymously with 'corporate identity' has huge advantages as brands are in business directly associated to money, value and profitability these days, whereas corporate identity has more connotations with organizational culture and internal processes. This practitioner-oriented viewpoint does not, however, diminish the need for new understanding on how consumers construct corporate images, an understanding that according to Brown (1998) is skeletal.

Reputation, on the other hand, defined as being formed over time based on company actions (Balmer & Greyser, 2003), is a collective representation of the company (Fombrun & Van Riel 2003), whereas image is an individual level concept. Hence, reputation narrows down a company's images to a socially constructed mass conception based on only company actions, whereas other scholars suggest that image is a product of multiple-variable impression formation processes located in the interaction among organizational texts, environmental and individual or personal factors (Williams & Moffitt 1997). Hence, there is a difference between the concepts *image* and *reputation*, although some writers use reputation and image interchangeably (Balmer & Greyser 2003). Perhaps it is due to ontological standpoints to prefer reputation over image as the research tradition is bound to the view that it is the company that controls and is the initiator of images, not the consumer or other sources in the environment. Accordingly, as consumers' images of the corporation reflect the company's branding efforts, it is also assumed that the corporate image can be changed even quickly by new corporate branding strategies.

The **consumer-focused research tradition** focuses on understanding product and/or corporate brands from the consumer's perspective on the individual, social, and cultural level, thus representing a subjectivist research tradition. On the individual level, the focus is on how consumers construct images, meanings and relationships with brands. On the social level, the focus is on how brands are used in social contexts, and on the

cultural level how brands become building brackets of culture, and how culture influences the individual consumer's image construction processes.

As already expressed by Levy (1959) in the 1950's, "people buy things not only for what they can do but also for what they mean" (118). In the 1980's, parallel with the organization-focused research tradition, a smaller consumer-focused subjectivist research tradition<sup>7</sup> developed. Based on Gordon's (2006) review of the period, she concludes the main findings as: first (1), people are not *tabula rasa*<sup>8</sup>, that is, blank sheets of paper on which communication messages are printed, and second (2), people interact with communication, whether consciously or not. Hence, consumers both have a memory and, consumers not only react to their company related experiences, they actively construct images and meanings in relation to their company related experiences (Lannon & Cooper 1983).

In accordance with the ideas presented, in the late 1990's a postmodern<sup>9</sup> research tradition developed, focusing on how consumers consume brands and build relationships with brands (Fournier & Yao, 1997) on the individual, social and cultural level. In this research tradition the focus is on the consumers' own experiences, and on how the consumers communicate these experiences through their brand relationships. Bengtsson (2003) suggests that although the brand relationship approach has enriched the understanding on the roles brands play in consumers' lives, he emphasizes the problems when using the word 'relationship' in this context. As interpersonal relationships require parallelism in a relationship, brands should be understood to have a behavior out of which the consumer constructs the brand's personality (Bengtsson 2003). However, brands are within the postmodern view seen as active partners in the consumer's brand relationship (Fournier 1998), and thus both parties in the relationship have agency. Bengtsson emphasizes that the brand's agency is transmitted and perceived through the company's branding efforts, which are quite standardized, thus brand relationships should be considered as "metaphoric" relationships (Bengtsson, 2003), and are not necessary based on transactions, as relational views within marketing emphasize.

However, within the genre of research, and especially within consumer culture theory, as defined by Arnould and Thompson (2005), the aim is seldom to enrich conventional branding models or to provide guidelines for companies. However, Schultz, Hatch et al. (2000) emphasize that consumers' brand meanings and relationships may be influenced by company actions, they may change, but they change in relation to all available influences on the marketplace. Schultz, Hatch et al. (2000) have given some managerial implications based on the postmodern research tradition on brands, namely, as images are seen as dynamic due to the dynamics in relationships it is the management's challenge to avoid fixation and keep the options open for the brand to develop. This

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<sup>7</sup> This tradition has been a variously termed research tradition. Based on Meenaghan's review (1995) the approach has been called the brand image school, the humanistic advertising approach, and right-hand side of brain approach.

<sup>8</sup> "The mind in its hypothetical primary blank and empty state before receiving outside impressions" Merriam-Webster online (<http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/tabula+rasa> visited 28.08.2007)

<sup>9</sup> The postmodern inquiry in consumer research looks for new methods and alternative ontology for research (Sherry, 1991).

managerial implication is in stark contrast with the conventional view, within which consistency and coherence in all actions is the recommendation.

The major implication of this consumer-focused postmodern research stream has been the insight that companies do not control images and relationships consumers construct with brands to the extent that is commonly assumed in the conventional branding literature (Thompson 2004). On the contrary, images are considered to be socially constructed constellations of meaning, negotiated between marketers and consumers and with implications for both parties as well as for the marketplace and society at large. Brands are everywhere, and this ubiquity enhances the importance of understanding them and their meaning for individuals, societies and cultures (O'Guinn & Muniz 2005), and what implications this understanding has on organization-focused views for corporate branding and images.

However, Pitt, Watson et al. (2006) point out that the dichotomy between the organization and the consumer (Brown et al., 2006) is done out of necessity and in the interest of simplification, although a sharp border between the perspectives (and scholars) may at times be difficult to draw. However, quite a few scholars have emphasized that the organization-focused views should be complemented by a receiver perspective (Cornelissen 2000), which also has been on the agenda in a search for a central theory that bridges both perspectives (Urde 2003). A more recent approach for understanding future brands is the proposal by Pitt, Watson et al. (2006) concerning open source brands. In their proposal and analysis of some specific open source brand phenomena, it is argued that in the future the dichotomy between the organization and consumer will break down completely and the focus will shift to "how images evolve over time" (Pitt, Watson et al. 2006, 123). Moreover, recent consumer research give insight into how consumers actively construct brand meanings (Bengtsson & Östberg 2006) indicating that the conventional organization-focused view should be developed towards a process-oriented view. Process-oriented views would recognize temporal perspectives, dynamisms and change.

The perspective taken in the present study follows the guidelines given by those researchers who emphasize a process-oriented view on images and that images evolve over time in relation to all available influences on the marketplace. Hence, it is recognized that consumers actively construct corporate images, meanings and relationships. The aim of the thesis is to provide a new understanding of how consumers construct corporate images and to bridge this understanding with an organization-focused research tradition within corporate image research.

Next, a discussion on how the temporal dimension has been noted within corporate image research is given.

### ***1.2.2. The temporal dimension within image research***

Despite the wide range of theories and models within the field of corporate image research, regardless of the focus taken, the temporal dimension in consumers' corporate images has been little studied, although, both implicitly and explicitly, the temporal dimension is frequently referred to:

“The facts of the past might not be in doubt, but their meaning always is” (Gioia, Schultz et al. 2000, 71).

Hatch and Schultz (2003) point out that the timeline in corporate branding is long (life of a company) as corporate images live both in the past and the future. Kotler and Keller define corporate images as “the perceptions and beliefs held by consumers, as reflected in the associations held in consumer memory” (Kotler & Keller 2005). What do consumers hold in their memory? All company actions over time or only a small part of them, and what part? As Christensen and Askegaard (2001, 297) emphasize: “most people today only have time and capacity to relate to a small fraction of the symbols and messages produced by contemporary organizations.”

Within the conventional organization-focused research tradition, the temporal perspective is usually conceptualized by the corporate reputation (Balmer & Greyser 2003). Corporate reputation stands for a collective representation of a firm’s past actions and has been defined by Fombrun and van Riel (2003) as:

A corporate reputation is a collective representation of a firm’s past actions and results that describes the firm’s ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders. It gauges a firm’s relative standing both internally with employees and externally with its stakeholders, in both its competitive and institutional environments (Fombrun & Van Riel 2003, 230).

Thus, corporate reputation is a collective image shared by several members of a group (Bromley 2001) and by definition, dependent on company actions (Markkanen 1999, 27). Fombrun and van Riel (2003) notice, however, that corporate reputation has remained relatively understudied.

Dowling (2002, 57) presents a model on factors affecting the consumers’ corporate images in which one element is “previous experience with the company and its products/service”. The temporal dimension is not however, elaborated on. Later in the textbook his focus is on cost efficacy, claiming that it is more cost-effective for companies to build on existing knowledge about a corporate image “than to create desired images from scratch” (Dowling, 2002, 204). Dowling’s notion of earlier experiences is of importance for the present study, as he indicates that consumers’ image constructions are influenced by how they have experienced the company and its messages earlier.

Aaker (1996) introduced the concept ‘brand heritage’ as part of the brand identity process and more specifically, as part of the company’s strategic brand analysis. Aaker does not discuss the concept, but includes it as an element in the company’s self-analysis. The conclusion drawn here is that brand heritage reflects in Aaker’s model past company actions from the organization’s perspective as Aaker recommends considering and analyzing earlier company actions, its heritage, history and reputation. Hence, it is assumed that the concept is organization-centered. Recently, Aaker (2004) suggested that companies could benefit from “going back to their roots and identify what made them special and successful in the first place.” (7) If this is done from the consumer perspective with a subjectivist approach, it could also reveal the roots of the organization’s present corporate images held by various stakeholder groups and other constituencies.

Schultz and Hatch (2003) studied the Lego company and suggest finding the right balance between respecting a company's authentic brand heritage and making this heritage relevant to current and future consumers is an ongoing concern in corporate branding strategy and encourages to look both at the past and future. Here the heritage proposition also leads to a historical analysis of earlier company actions with less insight into how consumers evaluate earlier company eras today. Hence, the conclusion drawn here is that brand heritage refers to an organization-focused view on the company's branding history and reputation-based on past company actions, not on how the company is remembered and has become embedded in the consumers' own experiences of the company over the years.

Keller's (2003) customer-based brand equity model (CBBE) takes a temporal focus on images as the basic assumption is that "the power of a brand lies in what customers have learned, felt, seen, and heard about the brand as a result of their experiences over time. In other words, the power of a brand lies in what resides in the minds of customers" (59). The perspective on equity is based on the organization's view, as Keller specifies that marketers both are the creators and the source for brand equity and it occurs "when the consumer has high level of awareness and familiarity with the brand and holds some strong favorable, and unique brand associations in memory (Keller 2003, 67). Additionally, Holt (2005) criticizes the model for not taking the brand-consumer connection into account in its historical context.

Learning has also been used as a concept to gain understanding of images. Van Osselaer and Alba (2000) propose that image is a "node of an associative network constituted by consumers' learned connections between the brand and a variety of cues, benefits, user types and symbolic meanings" (van Osselaer & Alba 2000). The authors studied the role of learning in consumer images concluding that images are benefit and motivation bound.

Within product branding, leveraging brand heritage has been a topic from a brand extension and brand alliances perspective (Durme van J, Brodie et al. 2003; Askegaard & Bengtsson 2005) as the brands that form the alliance bring their reputation and brand heritage into the coalition. Bengtsson (2002) studied consumer experiences, taking an interpretive approach with co-branded products, pointing out that a combination of two brands can be experienced in several different ways resulting in multiple meanings. As Bengtsson notices, the informants used past experiences of the products when evaluating the product, pinpointing "the importance of taking actual *consumption* into consideration when investigating how consumers relate to products with mixed brands" (2002, 525). He notices that previous research has focused on the likelihood of a consumer to try a co-branded product, but has not been able to address "how preferences develop through actual consumption" (Bengtsson, 2002, 525). The consumption Bengtsson refers to has actually happened earlier, indicating that meanings for products evolve over time.

However, as early as 1986 Gordon and Langmaid (in Gordon 2006) proposed a new definition of the branding *process*, opposing the current definition of creating a brand:

Branding may be thought of as the process of creating the totality of meaning which consumers attribute to a brand – the unique and relevant bundle of values that are internalized and combined with past experiences and/or current perceptions of the brand itself. (2006, 10)

In this definition the authors recognize the temporal dimension and possible influences of past experiences in current perceptions, but they take an organization-centered view on image when suggesting that it is the company that creates the totality of meanings. Also Worcester (1997) included a temporal dimension in his view on corporate images: “the net result of the interaction of all experiences, impressions, beliefs, feelings and knowledge people have about a company” (Worcester 1997, 147) emphasizing an accumulated image.

Within both service and branding literature comparably few approaches focus on understanding the branding of services or understanding the service brand from a consumer perspective (Grace & O’Cass, 2002). However, within service management literature Grönroos’ (1984) seminal model on services include corporate image as an element, which has aroused less attention than the suggested technical and functional service quality dimensions. The service literature emphasizes that services are processes co-generated together with the consumer, and that all contact points between the consumer and the service company are moments-of-truth (Grönroos, 2000). Thus, implicitly Grönroos introduced a temporal dimension into service images, namely, images are constructed based on a number of contacts during an ongoing relationship between the consumer and supplier. Therefore, image covers experiences over a longer time period, both for the service provider and for the consumer influencing both parties as both the service provider and consumer may construct a multiplicity of images and evaluations under the relationship.

As mentioned earlier, Pitt, Watson et al (2006) recently introduced the term “open source brands” and pinpointed that images can be open to evolve based on, and in interaction with, many sources: meanings, experiences, texts and physical aspects, and “produced” in an ongoing discourse between participants such as producers, consumers and/or other stakeholders. In their proposal and analysis of some specific open source images [brand phenomenon], it is argued that the dichotomy between the organization and consumers in the future will break down completely and the focus will shift to “how images evolve over time” (Pitt, Watson et al., 2006, 123). Open source images are dynamic, as are the sources for the image to evolve, but due to the consumer, who constructs his image, they are not rootless, as consumers have a memory. The proposal by Pitt, Watson et al. can also be enriched with a temporal dimension.

As was mentioned, empirical studies focusing on the temporal dimension of individual consumers’ corporate image constructions from a subjectivist stance are scant. However, Grace and O’Cass (2002) conducted a consumer-based qualitative study on image dimensions that hold meaning to consumers for both products and services. All interviewees indicated that their associations with the product or service had been long-term and the results represent an overall view of the image developed over time, rather than based on individual encounters. No differences were to be found between products and services regarding consumers’ past experiences and in both cases past experiences with the product or service were found to be a major contributor to the image today and a key dimension of it.

In sum, the temporal dimension of corporate images was discussed based on concepts and discussions within the conventional organization-focused corporate image research tradition on brands, images, identities and reputation as an organizational tool. Within the consumer-focused research tradition, the emphasis is on the individual, social, and cultural approach on images. A more thorough presentation of the concepts the field covers and image research will be given in Chapter 2.

The conclusion is that there is a lack of empirical research on the temporal dimension of individual level consumer-constructed corporate images. Moreover, no concept exists to define or describe the understanding on the temporal dimension of corporate brand images on the individual level. Hence, a research gap has been indicated.

Next, the research problem for the present study will be specified and discussed.

### **1.3. Research problem**

Based on the previous discussion and observations from the literature within the field of corporate image research, four (4) specific drivers that motivate further research emerged:

First, the approaches in the conventional organization-focused corporate brand, identity, reputation and image research tradition are inherited from an industrial era (Pitt, Watson et al. 2006) following the underpinnings that images to a large extent can be controlled and managed by the company, although quite a few scholars at the same time define the brand image to be “in the eye of the consumer.” Consequently, and as a number of researchers have pointed out, the field requires enrichment with subjectivist research, revealing how consumers construct corporate images, not least as current understanding within the field lacks empirical verification (Grace & O’Class, 2002). Corporate image *management*, mostly nowadays called branding, requires understanding of what in consumers’ image constructions can possibly be managed and how is this to be done. When studying images from a subjectivist stance we can get a glimpse<sup>10</sup> of the broad picture of how people actually comprehend and construct their corporate images, how we receive information *from* the world and how we act *on* the world (Solms & Turnbull 2002).

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<sup>10</sup> Freud was first to propose that most of our mental life operates unconsciously (Solms & Turnbull, 2002)



Second, a paradigm<sup>11</sup> shift towards a relational view in marketing<sup>12</sup> indicates that consumers' past experiences and future expectations come into play in consumer-constructed images. This observation forces to consider and study the temporal dimension in image constructions. Taking a relationship approach, the image will be affected by all contact points between those involved during the ongoing relationship (Grönroos, 2000), pinpointing the importance of understanding image constructions as evolving over time, especially as not all contact points between the company and consumers are concrete transactions known by the company.

Moreover, human beings have a memory and this concerns everything they experience, although some experiences are remembered and others not. Current literature within image research, regardless of the focus, does not sufficiently recognize the temporal dimension in consumers' image constructions. Alternatively, if recognized (e.g., Kotler & Keller, 2005)<sup>13</sup>, no empirical research has been conducted within the field on the temporal dimension per se in image constructions. Hence, developing an understanding of the temporal dimension requires a perspective of those involved.

Third, why introduce a new concept into a research tradition and field that already has been criticized for too many models and confusing concepts? Although memory is referred to and recognized by a number of scholars, no concept exists for describing, defining or understanding the temporal dimension in consumers' image constructions.

Fourth, the challenges of developing the understanding of consumer-constructed corporate images and the temporal dimension therein are crucial for both academic and practitioner understanding of corporate images as evolving over time such as Pitt, Watson et al.'s (2006) discussion on open source brands show.

The four general observations, grounded in the literature within the field, form a research arena, a mission to further develop the understanding of *how consumers construct their corporate images* from a subjectivist stance. With this ambition, an exploratory study was conducted. This study is discussed in detail in Chapter four (4). Based on the findings from the exploratory study, a temporal dimension emerged, and the idea to focus on *the temporal dimension in consumers' image constructions* was specified. As discussed earlier, the temporal dimension in images has been recognized by some scholars before, yet no studies existed on this specific research problem.

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<sup>11</sup> Paradigm is here understood according to Guba: "a basic set of beliefs that guides action, whether of the everyday garden variety or action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry" Guba, E., G, Ed. (1990). *The paradigm dialog*, SAGE Publications Inc.

<sup>12</sup> The new definition of marketing, unveiled at the AMA's Summer Educator's Conference in August 2004 is: "Marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders."

<sup>13</sup> Kotler and Keller (2005) define brands as "the perceptions and beliefs held by consumers, as reflected in the associations held in consumer memory" (2005, 286).

The research problem can thus be formulated as: *How do consumers construct their corporate images focusing on the temporal dimension in the image constructions?*

The core concepts in this thesis are *image* and *image heritage*. The view of consumer constructed corporate image that emerged based on the exploratory study is presented in Chapter 4. A discussion on the definitions of image by other scholars is presented in Chapter 2.

Image heritage stands for the temporal dimension in the individual consumer's image constructions. The concept was generated based on the findings from the empirical research focusing on consumers corporate image constructions. Likewise, a suggestion for a definition on image heritage is given in Chapter 4 of the thesis.

This study is positioned within strategic corporate image research within marketing; a specification is necessary as many of the concepts used in the thesis not only have their origin, but also their research traditions in other disciplines. Within the broad corporate image research arena, the perspective for this study is that of the consumer. Hence, the thesis is further positioned within the consumer-focused research tradition on brands. Within the tradition, no studies have been conducted focusing on the temporal dimension in the consumer's image construction processes. Hence, this study stands alone, as is shown in Figure 2.

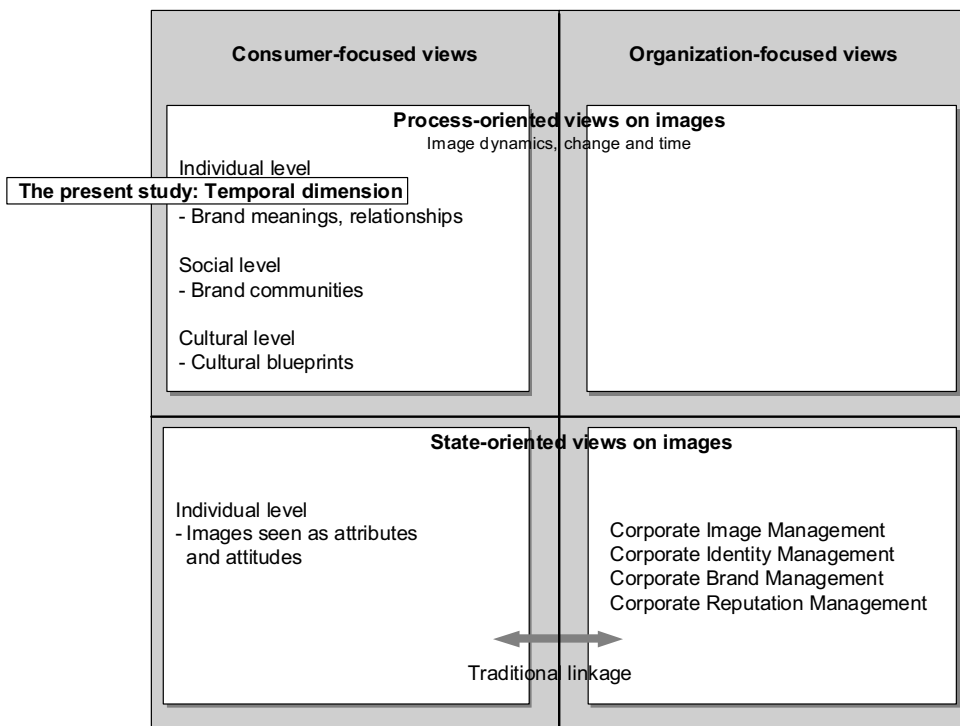


Figure 2 Positioning the study within image research

Based on the findings in the explorative study the research problem was specified to focus on the temporal dimension in the consumers' corporate image construction processes. Therefore the study is positioned within process-oriented views of corporate images from a consumer-focused perspective. Next, the research objectives and contribution are discussed.

#### **1.4. Purpose of the study**

With the research problem as the starting point, the aim of the present study is to investigate how consumers construct corporate images with an emphasis on developing an understanding on the role of the temporal dimension in consumers' corporate image constructions. These two aims offer four main contributions.

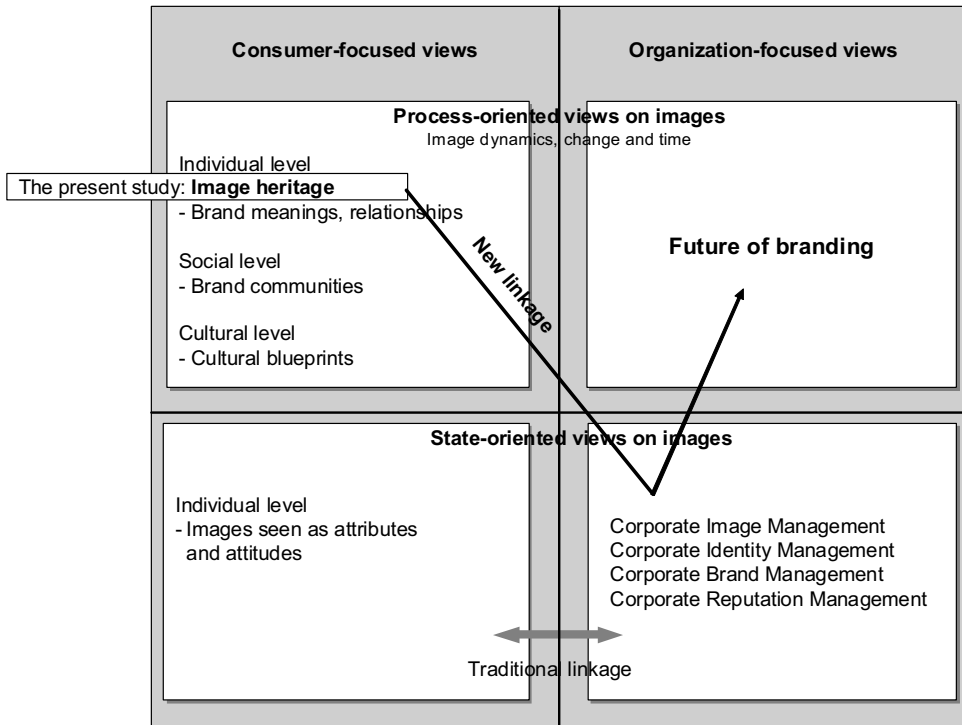
First, the thesis aims at contributing to the understanding of consumer-constructed corporate images.

Second, the developed understanding will contribute and support efforts taken by a number of researchers (e.g., Pitt, Watson et al. 2006) in bridging and enriching the organization-focused view with consumer-focused views of corporate images.

Third, as was pointed out, the approaches in the conventional organization-focused corporate brand, identity, reputation and image research tradition are to a large extent inherited from an industrial era although marketing thinking in general has moved from a transactional to a relational and network-focused view of consumer interface. The paradigm shifts within marketing reveal new perspectives within image research to be reflected upon. A relational view questions static concepts due to the dynamics in relationships. Relational views of images have been proposed by some researchers (e.g., Alvesson 1990) as well as process-oriented views on identities (Hatch & Schultz, 2002) requiring an understanding of images as processes, as the concepts are interrelated. In conclusion, consumers should be studied as active constructors of images and meanings instead of solely passive receivers of messages. Therefore, the thesis aims at pinpointing the importance of consumer orientation within the conventional organization-focused corporate image research tradition.

Fourth, the specific focus in the thesis is the temporal dimension in corporate image constructions. Since the temporal dimension in image constructions lacks study within corporate image research, this study aims at contributing to an understanding of the temporal dimension in consumers' image constructions. More specifically, the aim is to identify, describe and define the temporal dimension in consumer-constructed corporate images. This understanding contributes to both the consumer- and the organization-focused research traditions of corporate image research and enriches the understanding of corporate images within both views.

In Figure 3, the contribution of the study is summarized.



**Figure 3** Fields of research the study contributes to

Next, the limitations and key concepts used in the study are discussed.

### 1.5. Limitations

The study will be limited to focus on consumer-constructed corporate images in a retailing context. Thus, the study does not focus on any specific stakeholder group or any other level of image research, such as product level or branch level. Neither does the study focus on other contexts than the retailing context. Naturally, different stakeholder groups' images as well as other levels of image research and other contexts are very important for getting a holistic view and understanding of the temporal dimension in consumers' image constructions, but the limitation is done due to the exploratory nature of the study in a field where no other research exists. Therefore the study is mainly focused on conceptual development within corporate image research. The conducted study rather illustrates consumers' image constructions over time than is delimited to the retailing context. This limitation makes it possible to focus on new directions in thinking, which may have implications on the general level of image research.

A further limitation is that the study will deal with the concept of image although value and meaning too are important concepts for understanding why, for example, corporate brands or corporate reputation matter both for consumers and for companies. Thus,

brand meanings and brand values are in the present study rather considered as synonymous to image and further research on the temporal dimension may discuss how the concepts are interrelated or separated from each other.

The choice of company and context was originally made for the exploratory part of the study, which revealed the temporal dimension in consumers' corporate image constructions. However, the study is limited to focus on consumers' image constructions per se, not on retailer images. Although this limitation is made here in this study, the author is aware of that the results of the study support especially the latest trend of research within the retailing field, namely the complexity and dynamism of consumer-retailer-competitor relationships and their influence on loyalty (Babin & Chebat 2005).

The case company is a well-known Finnish retail chain, with a history that spans over 50 years. As the purpose of the study is conceptual development it is emphasized here that the focus in the study *is not* to examine or evaluate the case company's corporate images; rather, the case company is chosen and employed as an empirical context for conducting the study. Hence, based on this specific study, no overall conclusions can be drawn concerning the chosen case company's corporate image or branding strategies and how successful or unsuccessful they have been.

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the research approach is inductive and qualitative. As in similar studies, the researcher will learn about the research while conducting it. Hence, the process of gathering data, interviewing and analysis developed as the research proceeded. Due to the exploratory nature, the phenomenon also became clearer along with the process. The informants talked or wrote accounts mainly based on one single research question: "What does the company bring into your mind"<sup>14</sup>.

A subjectivist stance is central in the thesis, focusing on the mental and emotional relationships consumers construct with the company over time as expressed by the consumer. This does not, however, exclude other experiences the consumer could have expressed during other interviews, as the purpose of a grounded theory approach is to examine processes, not individual people as such (Douglas 2003). Hence, the study at hand does not focus on corporate image constructions in the *retailing* context, but corporate image constructions on a general conceptual level. It is important to notice that all cognitive, emotional and motivational operations are affected by changes in mood, vigilance and waking state (Solms & Turnbull 2002) and that consciousness is but a part of the mind. Consumers have far less access to their own mental activities, as ninety-five percentage of our thinking takes place unconsciously (Zaltman 2003). However, although images are intangible constructions and often difficult to express (Blackstone, 2000), "we cannot come to know about other people's images on the basis of their observable non-verbal behavior. Instead we have to depend upon their verbal behavior: in other words, upon what they say, rather than upon what they do" (Richardson 1999, 9).

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<sup>14</sup> The research question was posed in Finnish and was formulated as "Mitä sinulle tulee mieleen Anttilasta?"

As discussed earlier, the key concepts within the field, and how they have been defined by various scholars, will be discussed in more detail in chapter two (2). Additionally, the main four concepts that function as important foundations for research within corporate image research are (1) image, (2) identity, (3) brand, and (4) reputation. In the thesis, identity is used as a term referring to the company, whereas image, brand and reputation are used when referring to the consumer despite the concept of a brand being a controversial term, as it can in the literature refer to either the company or the consumer. Nevertheless, brand is a mental picture of something for someone and its meanings are defined by the consumers, although companies may have an influence on that meaning.

Next, paradigmatic, methodological and empirical considerations will be presented as they frame the overall research approach in relation to the research arena, research problem, research objectives and limitations for the study.

### **1.6. Paradigmatic, methodological and empirical considerations**

In this section, ontological and epistemological questions will be discussed in relation to the perspectives and the research conducted in 2003-2005. These perspectives have also influenced the purpose of the study and the selection of the most suitable research methodology.

A paradigm encompasses four concepts: ethics, epistemology (the nature of knowledge), ontology (nature of reality and human beings) and methodology (through which that knowledge can be obtained) (Denzin & Lincoln 2003). Questions concerning the paradigm, the worldview that guides the investigator, are fundamental as they not only direct the purpose of the research, but also provide descriptions of what to see (Schwandt 1994).

Science is limited to answering questions that can be asked within a particular world-view; it cannot test the worldview itself.....scientists can do no more than ensure that they are *aware* of the world-views they endorse, because the assumptions these entail will determine the experimental questions they ask and how they interpret them. (Solms & Turnbull 2002, 55)

According to Berger and Luckman (1966), “reality is socially constructed”. “The sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality” (1967, 15) analyzing the process in which reality occurs.

I am aware of my endorsement of a social constructionist worldview. Furthermore, I believe that all human knowledge is developed, transmitted and maintained in social interactions. As a constructivist, I am committed to the belief that an understanding of images is based on the kinds of meanings or systems of meanings people construct in relation to a company. According to Czarniawska (2003), construction, in opposition to creation and discovery, can be understood as a process where something is being built out of the existing material as a sense-making activity (Morgan & Smircich 1980; Denzin & Lincoln 2003; Lincoln & Guba 2003). Therefore, a constructivist view includes an understanding of man as a social constructor (Morgan & Smircich 1980) and a subjectivist stance is appropriate.

I believe that how we construct our image of a company is a social sense-making activity, which shapes action (or inaction). Following Lincoln and Guba (2003, 264), I also believe that these sense-making activities themselves can be changed when found incomplete, faulty or malformed. This indicates a process-oriented view on images.

Different epistemologies justify qualitative inquiry (Schwandt 2003). Interpretive, hermeneutics and social constructionist embrace different perspectives on the aim and practice of understanding human action. Constructionists see meaning as constructed, philosophical hermeneutics understands meaning as negotiated (i.e., a matter of coming to terms), whereas interpretivists look at understanding as “found.” This study is based on a constructivist paradigm, relativist ontology (multiple realities), subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understanding), and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures (following Denzin & Lincoln, 2004). Qualitative research should follow some well-reasoned logic in interacting with the empirical material, and use rigorous techniques for analyzing the data (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000). Based on the ontological and epistemological assumptions, the research problem and the purpose of the study, a grounded theory approach is appropriate for gathering and analyzing the data for a theory to emerge on how consumers construct corporate images and the temporal dimension in the consumer’s corporate image constructions. Moreover, the choice of grounded theory is also supported by the aforementioned conceptual confusion within the field of corporate image research. Following Mintzberg’s line of thought, the more complex we find the field of research to be, the more we need to fall back on so-called exploratory studies with an inductive logic, as opposed to rigorous research methodologies (1979, 584).

Next, grounded theory is briefly introduced and discussed for validating it as a methodology especially suitable for the present study.

### ***1.6.1. Grounded theory as a methodology***

Grounded theory is an inductive method, originally created in the 1960’s by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss as a counter-reaction to traditional sociological deductive research, in which a theory is chosen as the basis for data collection and analysis. In their seminal work “The Discovery of Grounded Theory” published in 1967, the original idea was to create a research method for fields where no previous theory existed.

As corporate image constructions from a subjectivist stance is an unstudied phenomenon within corporate image research, grounded theory is a well-suited method for the study at hand. Grounded theory is in the present study employed to discover an emerging theory on *the temporal dimension in consumers’ corporate image constructions* from a subjectivist stance, a perspective grounded theory is especially appropriate for as grounded theory’s methodological emphasis is on the actor’s own emergent interpretations and meanings, with minimal researcher intervention (Douglas 2003).

The underpinnings in grounded theory are dynamic as phenomena are not considered to be static but in a process of continuous change. The purpose with a grounded theory approach is to process this change into a theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

One of the basic assumptions in a grounded theory approach is that the study is not based on any previous studies or theories but on analysis of the data at hand. In the present study, models and theories to be found in the marketing literature were found to be insufficient or too general for understanding individual consumers' image constructions. Hence, these theories did not have the role of basic assumptions on image constructions in the conducted study. Thus, earlier theories and models did not determine what was discovered in the collected data although the theories provided a pre-understanding for the researcher on corporate image research.

In grounded theory the researcher does not test other people's theories but creates a theory of his own. It is created gradually through an open interaction with the data, and it acts as a foundation for organizing the data. Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research. During the analyzing process the researcher 'socializes' with other researchers' theories while developing his own (Glaser & Strauss 1967). In this research, the analytical stage is based entirely on the gathered data, whereas the synthetic stage includes some "socialization" with other researchers' theories.

Theory generated with a grounded theory approach takes a substantive or formal status. *Substantive theory* is relevant to a given substantive area and *formal theory* is a conceptual theory in which the comparative analysis is made among different kinds of substantive cases without relating them to any one substantive area. The focus of comparison is on generating a theory of status passage, not on generating theory about a single substantive case of status passage (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). *In this research the focus is on generating a starting point for a formal theory* on the temporal dimension in consumers' image constructions, but within the field of image research within marketing. As good grounded theory should be modifiable to new subjects and perspectives of the same problem (Glaser, 1992, 24), the starting point for a formal theory is based on comparison of the findings with research, especially in neuroscience, a field of science in its beginning.

In Figure 4, the overall research process and reasoning is depicted.



Activity	Reasoning	Results	Time span of the research process
<b>Background</b> Work and teaching experience in image related subjects		Questioning how do consumers construct images	
<b>Research process</b> Literature study	Deduction	Recognizing the conceptual confusion and skeletal understanding of consumer constructed corporate images (subjective stance)	Autumn 2002
Explorative study In-depth interviews	Induction	Recognizing the image construction process and the temporal dimension. First attempt to define Image Heritage	Spring 2003
Selective phase Study 1-4	Deduction	Questioning some of the results (e.g. age as an indicator for length of image heritage)	2003
Selective phase Study 5 In depth interviews Starting to collect memos	Induction	Defining Image Heritage	2005
Theoretical phase Literature study based on the analysis	Socialization with other research Induction + deduction	Generating the starting of a formal theory within the field	2006
Finalizing the thesis		Generating the starting of a formal theory within the field	2007

Figure 4 Overall research process and reasoning in the present study

### 1.6.2. Empirical context

Due to the exploratory nature of the first study, the aim for the empirical context was to choose a well-known company most people would be aware of. Also, another aim was to focus on consumers, not customers or any other specific stakeholder group, as the focus for the exploratory study was to inductively gain some general understanding of the image construction process. The chosen company was Anttila and the empirical context was retailing. It turned out that the informants were also customers however, the focus remained on the consumers' image constructions.

The impulse for choosing Anttila dates back to an episode (see Chapter 3) which made me realize that the company's long history was interpreted differently by various consumers, indicating multiplicity in images, which I intuitively regarded to be a good foundation for gaining understanding on how consumers construct the image of the company. As a well-known company, it was also assumed that most Finns would be aware of the company. Anttila is also a common family name in Finland, so it was considered that informants might not at all associate the name with the company. The company is introduced in more detail in Chapter 3 (section 3.3.4).

### 1.7. The structure of the thesis

Before going further into a discussion on the theoretical settings within corporate image research, the structure of the thesis will be presented. The entire research process and structure of the thesis are illustrated in Figure 5. The left part of the Figure illustrates the structure of the thesis and the right part the research process and as can be noticed from the Figure, the reporting of the study does not follow the inductive logic of the research process.

The first chapter, *the introduction*, gives a background of the area under study focusing on the research gap in the literature that motivates the need for the research at hand. It is suggested that research within the field of corporate images seldom takes a subjectivist stance, although the paradigmatic change within marketing into relational stances urges it. Process-oriented views on images imply temporal dimensions in image constructions, but the temporal dimension has not been studied within the field, especially not from a subjectivist stance. The thesis introduces a new concept for understanding the temporal dimension in consumers' corporate image constructions. The concept, image heritage, has implications on all image-related concepts within corporate image research. The research setting is described, and the research approach clarified. One section is devoted to the anchoring of the methodological choices.

The second chapter, the *literature review on corporate image literature and research* represents both a traditional literature review and part of the theoretical phase in the grounded research approach employed in the study. In the chapter consumer- and organization-focused views on corporate images are presented. Despite differences in paradigmatic assumptions within the perspectives, both perspectives construct the conceptual framework for the present thesis and also the field of research to which the thesis aims at contributing. However, due to the inductive logic in the thesis, the central concepts and how they are understood within the field are presented and discussed in the light of the conducted study as the literature review was rewritten after the study was analyzed.

The third chapter, *grounded theory for studying corporate image constructions* presents grounded theory as a methodology for research.

The fourth chapter, *the temporal dimension in consumers' corporate image constructions* presents the data analysis, findings from the conducted empirical study, and emergent theory on the temporal dimension in consumers' corporate image constructions. The theoretical phase includes "socializing with other researchers' research" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), and is presented as a discussion based on a literature review of images and memory within neuroscience and psychology as they relate to the emerging understanding of corporate image constructions. Charmaz (2006) discusses the often disputed and misunderstood issue of a literature review when having a grounded theory approach and she points out that literature reviews in a grounded theory approach are employed to deepen the understanding of the emerging theory. Hence, Glaser and Strauss (1967), the founders of the methodology, suggest delaying the review until the analysis is completed. In this research, literature reviews were conducted (not clear) both within image research literature and other literature after

analyzing the data. Hence, chapter four sets the foundation for the discussion on what kind of theory, substantive or formal, is presented in the thesis.

In the fifth chapter, *discussion*, conclusions, implications, and contribution of the study are discussed, outlining directions for future research. The implications of the research, and especially of the image heritage concept, are related to the domain of corporate image research. Suggestions for future research will be given as well.

# Overall research process and reasoning in the study

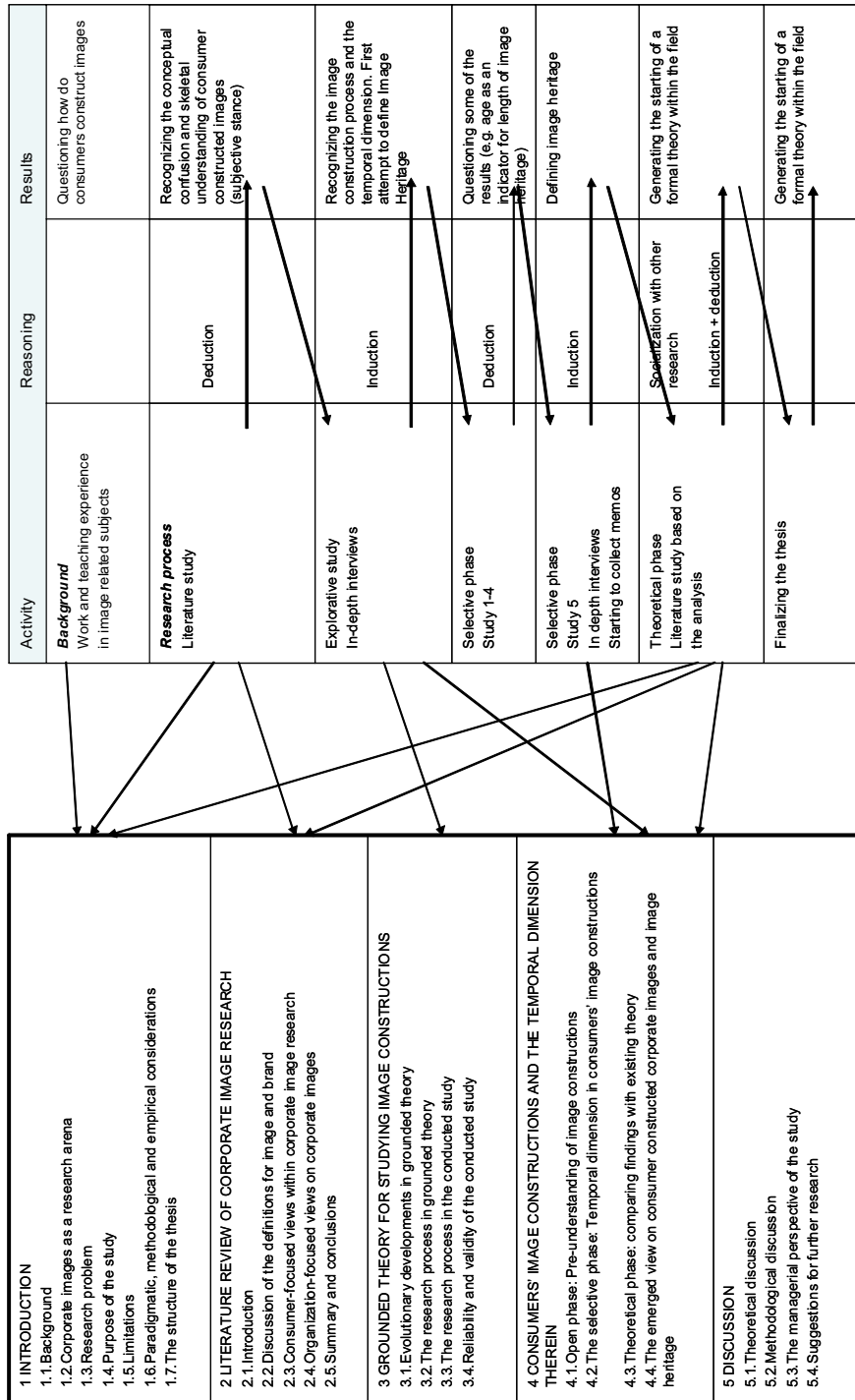


Figure 5 Structure of the thesis in relation to the research process

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW OF CORPORATE IMAGE RESEARCH

This chapter presents corporate image research, to which this thesis aims at contributing, and how image and brand have been conceptualized and studied from the perspective of the research problems for the thesis, namely: *how do consumers construct their corporate images* with an emphasis on the *temporal dimension in the image constructions*. As is shown in Figure 5 (Chapter 1) of the ‘overall research process and reasoning in the present study’, the literature review has been written in two phases. The first literature review was an overall review of the four conceptualizations within image research, to which the present study aims at contributing, namely corporate image management, corporate identity management, corporate brand management and corporate reputation management with the aim to deepen my understanding of the concepts, how they differ from each other and how image construction is understood within the literature. The second literature review represents the *theoretical phase* in a grounded theory approach and is based on the findings both from the explorative phase and the selective phase of the study.

In Figure 1, Chapter 1 an overview of image research was given. The overview in the Figure structures the literature review also in this chapter.

In the Figure a distinction is made between consumer-focused and organization-focused image research with regard to whether image is understood as static or constructed as dynamic processes. Traditionally, within the four dominant conceptualizations in corporate image research, images are usually defined and studied as attributes and attitudes. In process-oriented views, images are considered to be constructed on the individual, social and cultural level. Research within this field is, however, rarely linked to organization-focused managerially-oriented views of image research. The present study is positioned within the process-oriented views on the individual level in image research, but in contrast to other related studies, it aims at contributing to organization-focused managerially-oriented views by introducing a process-oriented relational view on branding within which the temporal dimension is considered. This novel view is here regarded to represent an approach within the future of branding.

As pointed out and discussed earlier, only some empirical studies have been conducted for understanding the temporal dimension in image constructions. The literature study is thus directed by the research problems, the findings in the empirical study, and the aim of the study, which justify the comprehensive literature review.

There are multiple ways of structuring and presenting an exploration of literature. Due to the inductive logic in the present study, an emphasis has been put on approaches the conducted study supports. Additionally, an emphasis has been put on clarifying the difference between organization-focused managerially-oriented views, and consumer-focused or process-oriented views within corporate image research.

The order chosen for the presentation opposes the conventional view within the field of image research, but follows the consumer-focused view taken in the thesis. Thus, consumer-focused views within corporate image research are presented first starting

with state-oriented views on images, and followed by process-oriented views on images. State-oriented views are usually related to the conventional organization-focused views on corporate image management, whereas process-oriented views, especially postmodern research, rarely aim at contributing to corporate image management, but to consumer understanding per se.

Keller and Lehmann (2006) conclude in their extensive overview on research findings and future priorities on brands and branding that “there has been somewhat of a preoccupation with brand extensions and some of the processes that lead to the development of brand equity” (2006, 754), in comparison to the relatively limited efforts devoted to financial, legal and social impacts of brands. In other words, the overwhelming majority of research within the field is management-oriented, in which brand images are regarded as states, not processes. There is a shortage of process-oriented views, although the postmodern consumer culture theory research stream focuses on brand meanings as well as relationships on the individual, social and cultural level. However, Keller and Lehmann (2006) point out that “little integration of the streams or to qualitative work on branding has appeared” (2006, 754). Methodologically, the emphasis has been on controlled experimentation. However, a movement from conventional branding towards corporate branding has started in the late 1990’s early 2000’s in which key issues are not organization centralism but the relations between strategic vision, organization culture and consumer images (Schultz 2006). Therefore, a move towards integration of the two perspectives has started.

This chapter starts with a brief discussion of two dominant scientific movements, modernism and postmodernism, which have influenced how marketers and marketing have viewed consumers, and accordingly, how images have been defined, namely, the locus of image. The locus of image may be defined as (1) perceptions in the consumer’s mind, (2) an object in the external world, such as company defined brands, or (3) multidimensionally, as a “transactional process between the brand stimulus and the consumer perceiver” (Stern, Zinkhan et al. 2001).

The chapter continues with a presentation of consumer-focused and organization-focused approaches within corporate image research. The challenge to give a comprehensive view of corporate image research and the management of the images from a company’s perspective is demanding due to the extensive body of concepts, perspectives and research within the field (Berens & van Riel 2004). The true challenge is, however, to manage the multidisciplinary field and its inconsistent use of central concepts, which has also been considered to hinder theoretical development (for an overview, see e.g. Balmer 2001; Stern, Zinkhan et al. 2001) within the field. The conceptual mess has led to the study of different phenomena under the same name, the same phenomena under different names or a combination of the two (Stern, Zinkhan et al. 2001). Many scholars have proposed approaches and models for consistent use of terminology and for framing the central questions within the field, the latest attempt being the one by Brown, Dacin, Pratt and Whetten (2006). In their approach, the buzzword of today “brand” is not included, and therefore, their proposal cannot be regarded as a comprehensive framework for solving inconsistent use of the terminology. However, the four central viewpoints they recognize (Brown, Dacin et al. 2006) are used in the thesis to structure the literature review:

- (1) “What do consumers actually think of the organization?” in this paper refers to corporate image or brand,
- (2) “Who are we as an organization?” in this paper refers to organizational identity,
- (3) “What does the organization want others to think about the organization?” in this paper refers to corporate identity or brand promise,
- (4) “What does the organization believe others think of the organization?” in this paper refers to the social part of identity.

In conclusion, the chapter is organized as follows: after discussing image and brand definitions, the consumer-focused research tradition will be presented with an emphasis on process-oriented views on images and brands. This presentation relates to the first question above posed by Brown et al. Next, the organization-centered questions will be discussed (questions one to three) and the related conceptualizations presented. The chapter ends with a presentation of a comprehensive model for managing corporate images from an organization-focused view by Helen Stuart (1999), and another model depicting a relational view on identities and images by Hatch and Schultz (2002), and finally, conclusions will be drawn based on the literature study.

## 2.1. Introduction

From a marketing perspective, the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be analyzed based on two major approaches for theoretical thinking, namely *modernism* (in different fields of science since the 1890's) and *postmodernism* (in different fields of science since the 1930's). The main defining difference between these approaches can be crystallized as the “postmodernism's rejection of the modernist idea that human social experience has fundamental ‘real’ bases” (Firat, Dholakia et al. 1995, 40). From a postmodern perspective, the existence and persistence regarding, for example, the individual, self, and agency depend on the *imaginary* (Firat, Dholakia et al. 1995). Therefore, images are at the core of postmodern marketing research. However, a brief introduction of the perspectives is given.

Modernism has been characterized by its mechanical worldview and symbolized by the human being as a machine. According to the modern view, individuals have quite stable and unchanging personalities and identities (Åhman 2003). The implications of a worldview on individuals as a ‘one-dimensional rational man’ searching for the ‘best alternative’ have been manifold within marketing. Within brand and image management, where the image has been considered to be “the result of a coherent organizational and marketing approach, which uses all elements of the marketing mix” (de Chernatony & McDonald 2003, 21), the implications have been to a large extent a simplification wherein consumer images are regarded to be formed in consumers minds as linear cognitive processes based on messages sent by the company and filtered through personal and cultural factors (Williams & Moffitt 1997). In this view, consumers are seen as passive message receivers who react to messages, more or less from an “empty table” (see for example Gordon 2006 for a critique on the view). This

‘rationalization approach’ regards brands as having one objective and precise, and hence measurable, value (Askegaard & Bengtsson 2005).

In the contemporary world “we live in a symbol-rich environments and the meaning attached to any situation or object is determined by the interpretation of these symbols” (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998). Hence, it has been argued by many researchers within marketing that the modernist view of consumers and consumption is not accurate in the contemporary world of today, but belong to an era that has ended (Addis & Podestà 2005), and has to be enriched by other perspectives (Firat & Venkatesh 1995). It has, for example, been argued that consumers actively create messages and meanings also without, or with minimal influences from the company (see for example Botan 1993; Finne 2004 ). New media has, for example, made interaction among consumers possible, and the control over contact and content is increasingly in the hands of consumers (Cornelissen 2000).

The other big movement during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, postmodernism, started as early as the 1930’s but has influenced different fields within science at different periods. The central thought in postmodernism is that there is no single objective truth of reality, only different perspectives and angles to it (Åhman 2003) based on the imaginary (Firat, Dholakia et al. 1995). Within marketing, according to Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) it is central to realize that consumers do not make consumption choices solely on the basis of product utilities, but also on their symbolic meanings. This idea has, however, been well established in image research since the 1950’s. From a postmodern view, the symbolic meanings of products and images are used by consumers as symbolic resources, or as Holt (2002) has suggested, offered as cultural blueprints for the consumer to construct the identity s/he prefers (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998). Therefore, from the postmodern perspective it is crucial for the marketer, not only to understand images from a consumer perspective, but also how it operates as a building bracket in the consumer’s identity construction process on the individual and social level, and how images are influenced by, and influence culture.

Within image research, brand meaning and brand meaning management research represent the postmodern perspective. The research stream focuses on the consumer and is positioned mainly within consumer culture theory (as defined by Arnould & Thompson 2005) developed from consumer behavior research. In contrast to the modernist perspective, postmodern brand research is quite loosely, if at all, related to organizations’ branding processes for developing corporate branding strategies. Holt (2005) has, however, pinpointed some differences between the two approaches in his strong criticism of the mainstream consumer-based brand equity model (CBBE) developed by Keller (Keller 1993). His critique focuses on how brand symbolism is understood and treated in the model, emphasizing the role of abstract brand associations. Holt (2002) argues that in the CBBE model, it is assumed that brand symbolism consists of abstract association (attributes and benefits) although cultural research has consistently demonstrated that consumers understand brand symbolism in terms of concrete stories and images, not abstract associations. Additionally, Holt (2005) emphasizes that brand symbolism is used by consumers in their identity projects, rather than as association-based ‘knowledge structures’ in the minds of individual consumers. Moreover, mainstream branding literature emphasizes that “brand symbolism is successful when it is strong, favorable and unique” (277) proposing



metrics, not components of an explanatory model that show the process through which the consumer builds these associations. Finally, he criticizes one of the cornerstones in mainstream branding literature, namely that brands can be successful only if the company is consistent in brand associations over time. Thus, it is assumed that consumers prefer stability. Holt points out that symbolism is always historically specific. In conclusion, stable brands face a risk of becoming old-fashioned if not tuned up over time. Based on Holt's critique, the conclusion can be drawn that dynamic and relational process models are to be developed as they are better in considering the temporal dimension and that brand symbolisms and images may change over time.

Before a discussion on consumer-focused views within image research, a discussion on the concept 'image' and 'brand' is provided, as there is no consensus about what an image or brand is (Stern, Zinkhan et al. 2001; Stern 2006).

## 2.2. Discussion of the definitions for image and brand

As mentioned in the introduction of the thesis, image and brand have been used as synonymous concepts in the thesis and are considered interchangeable due to the consumer-focus, although it is recognized that there is a semantic difference in the nuance of the words. Balmer has argued that it is more a question of fashion which word is in fashion at a certain time (Balmer 2001).

Image as the basic element of thought has underpinned many philosophers' works since Aristotle's times (Grunig 1993; Balmer & Greyser 2003)<sup>15</sup>. The Oxford English Language Reference<sup>16</sup> describes images as:

Image is an old word (13c) derived from Latin *imago* meaning 'copy, likeness, picture and in all its meanings suggests a real or mental picture. Since the late 1950s it has been used by marketers, advertisers, and (more recently) political spin-doctors to mean 'a concept or impression created in the minds of the public about a particular person, product, institution, etc. (Oxford English Language Reference)

On a more general level, Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary (1983, 907) defines image as:

(a) A mental picture of something; conception; idea; impression, (b) A concept of a person, product, institution etc. held by the general public, often one deliberately created or modified by publicity, advertising etc. (Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary 1983, 907).

Richardson (1999, 1) defines image in his textbook on cognitive psychology by referring to the Oxford English Dictionary, namely:

Image....A mental representation of something (esp. a visible object), not by direct perception, but by memory or imagination; a mental picture or impression; an idea, conception (Oxford English Dictionary).

<sup>15</sup> Richardson (1999) and Stern, Zinkhan et al. (2001) provide a short etymology of the word.

<sup>16</sup> "image" *Pocket Fowler's Modern English Usage*. Ed. Robert Allen. Oxford University Press, 1999. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Swedish School of Economics and Business. 6 March 2007 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t30.e1870>>

The definitions reveal three commonalities; first, that image is a mental picture, conception, idea or impression of something located in the mind of an individual, as is proposed in Richardson's (1999) textbook, or, held in the minds of the general public, as defined in Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary (1983). Thus, image is seen both as an individual and as a collective level concept as it can be held in the minds of one person and/or the general public. Second, that memory or imagination plays a role in images. And third, that image may deliberately be created or modified by external sources, like other people or companies.

Within business research, the issue of corporate images and its impact on the company's success has been on the agenda since the 1950's. Martineau's (1958) seminal article "The personality of the retail store" revealed that a favorable corporate image provided an organization with a distinctive competitive advantage. In the article, Martineau suggests that corporate image is a *stereotype held by the public* based on both *functional* (quality, service, etc.) and *emotional meanings* held by *various groups* (1958). Hence, Martineau proposed a two-dimensional definition on corporate image.

An extensive analysis on how corporate image has been defined since Martineau's times was conducted by Stern, Zinkhan et al. (2001) in which the authors noted that a shift since Martineau's times towards definitions on image with an emphasis on the consumers' impressions had taken place.

In their analysis, Stern, Zinkhan et al. (2001) examined the inconsistent use of the term 'image' in reference to brand, corporate and store image. The analysis is based on the concept's locus, nature, and number:

- The locus refers to the ontology of images,
- The nature refers to whether an image is a state (static) or a process (transaction between sender and receiver), and
- The number refers to whether an image is a gestalt multidimensional construct or a particularistic one-dimensional construct.

The locus for image has been discussed by Alvesson (1990) and he proposed that the meaning of image can be defined from three ontological perspectives suggesting a trichotomy rather than dichotomy. The locus can refer to an entity in the world, in the mind or in cyberspace (Stern 2006). Based on Alvesson's (1990) proposal:

- Firstly, image can be defined as the outcome of the sender's purposeful actions, where the image is managerially controlled. Image is the communicated attributes of an object. Based on this view, the focus is on the management of corporate actions in order to define the company on the market (Aaker 2004). Within the perspective, images are studied as mirroring the company.
- Secondly, image can be seen as a mental picture of something held by someone. On the corporate level, the corporate image is "what consumers perceive the organization to be" (Markwick & Fill 1997), and from the company's

perspective, it is the stereotyped<sup>17</sup> part (Martineau 1958) of these images, ‘the gestalt,’ that is the image (Stern, Zinkhan et al. 2001). Marckwick and Fill (1997) argue that corporate image results from an interpretation of a range of perceptual stimuli only some of which can be influenced directly by an organization. Hence, three main groups of perceptual stimuli can be recognized, first, stimuli an organization has **no influence** on, second, stimuli a company has **limited influence** on or it can **indirectly** influence or take into account, and third, stimuli a company has or can **influence** (for a discussion, see Krishnan 1996).

It has also been proposed that people’s individual conceptual filters steer the way he/she reacts to information (Krone 1987), although the reactions do not necessarily give implications for action (Balmer 2001; Cornelissen & Harris 2001).

- This third ontology is an ‘in-between’ stance in which “an image is the result of a projection directed from two sources: the individual imagination and processing of information and the messages sent by someone” (Alvesson 1990, 376).

Based on Stern, Zinkhan et al. (2001), the classification mentioned above, in this third ontology, the locus for image would be relational, referring to a process between the sender and the receiver, and the number of images would be multiple depending of the individuals taking part in the process of image constructions. Botan (1993) has emphasized that “dialogical communicators assume that their publics have as varied and valid interpretations of the world as do their clients” (ibid, 71) resulting in a joint interpretation process together with the client, exemplifying the in-between perspective as a shared image, in which the consumer is an active constructor of images (Meenaghan 1995; Fournier 1998) from multiple sources:

An interpretive community, or publics, interprets public relations messages partially on the basis of experience, partially on the basis of its environment or culture, and partially on the basis of the communication itself. The result is a new shared image based on subjective interpretations that are always changing and upon which there is never and can never be perfect agreement (Botan 1993, 73).

To summarize and conclude, Stern, Zinkhan et al. (2001) found out, based on their analysis, that a consensus on the locus, nature and number of the concept of image was to be generalized: the locus was considered to be in the mind of consumers, the nature an impression or perception, and the number one-dimensional and single as image is an overall impression that summates the segment’s impressions (Stern, Zinkhan et al 2001, 213). Hence, image is in the literature generally considered to be a consumer concept, it is rather seen as a state than as a dynamic ever-changing process, and the outcome is singular, suggesting that the company has *an* image, not many images.

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<sup>17</sup> Balmer and Greyser (2003) define stereotype image as “the holding of shared beliefs across all stakeholder groups” (2003, 175) so that some dimensions are the same across stakeholder groups. The focus is on the recipient rather than the transmitter of images.

However, Stern, Zinkhan et al. (2001) urge the development of views on images towards binary dualism for gaining a more holistic both/and (called by Alvesson 1990 “in-between”) approach on images in which the image is variously located in the external world and in the mind, and descriptive of both state and process. Hence, they propose a dynamic relational view on images as processes in which the image is co-created through interaction between ‘the external world’ and ‘the consumer.’ This suggestion supports Alvesson’s (1990) suggestion of an in-between ontology positioned in the relationship dynamics between the consumer and the company, within which the image is constructed, based on interaction and transaction between the sender and the receiver, resulting in a gestalt multidimensional construct. Williams and Moffitt’s (1997) study provided empirical evidence that an organization’s image is the outcome of a process influenced by multiple organizational, personal and environmental factors. The present study supports the view that images are relational processes and that also on individual level images can be, and often are, many. Thus it was found that the consumer’s image constructions were multi-dimensional and also contradictory to each other.

Although Stern, Zinkhan et al. (2001) notice that no current method to measure the gestalt has yet been developed, Alvesson (1990) pointed out that an understanding of image “as a holistic and vivid impression held by a particular group towards a corporation,” (164) partly based on the individual, partly on the company, points at the process of image construction, and has elements of both parties.

Next, in Table 1 below, examples of definitions of the concept of image since Stern, Zinkhan et.al’s (2001) article are analyzed based on same dimensions the authors used in their analyses. As an exception, David Bernstein’s (1984) influential definition is also analyzed.

**Table 1** Selected definitions on corporate images

<b>Author</b>	<b>Definition on corporate brand images</b>	<b>Locus</b> Ontology	<b>Nature</b> Static vs. process	<b>Number</b> Multi- vs. one-dimensional
Bernstein (1984, 233)	Image is a representation in the mind. But it is very powerful. It is a 'true reality'.	Subject	Static	One-dimensional
Bromley (2001)	The internal collective state of mind that underlies its corporate communications efforts (successful or not) to present itself to others.	Object	Static	One-dimensional
Dowling (2002, p. 19)	"The global evaluation (comprised of a set of beliefs and feelings) a person has about an organization".	Subject	Static	One-dimensional
Kotler (2003, p. 326)	Image is the way the public perceives the company or its products.	Subject	Static	One-dimensional
Kotler and Keller (2005).	"the perceptions and beliefs held by consumers, as reflected in the associations held in consumer memory"	Subject	Process	Multi-dimensional
Bengtsson & Östberg 2006	Corporate brand image is by the consumer actively constructed meaning of a brand	Subject	Process	One-dimensional
<b>Definition based on the present study</b>	<b>Corporate images are constructed through dynamic relational processes based on a multifaceted network of earlier images from multiple sources over time</b>	Subject	Process	Multi-dimensional

The analysis is based on a relativist worldview and the point made here is that the urge addressed by Stern, Zinkhan et al. (2001) has not received widespread acceptance. Stern proposes the development of views of images towards binary dualism to gain a more

holistic approach on images in which the image is variously located in the external world and in the mind, and descriptive of both state and process. As can be noticed, scholars still tend to define image as singular, although it is recognized that different people may have different images about objects since they use different criteria when evaluating them (Cornelissen 2000; Vuokko 2000; Bromley 2001). Hence, an organization may have many images depending on the evaluator, but as was mentioned above, it is supposed that the stereotype part of these evaluations is the image. Consequently, the corporate image is usually dealt with as singular, although it is specified based on a number of attributes. Moreover, only Bengtsson and Östberg see image constructions clearly as a process, whereas the definition given by Kotler and Keller (2005) can be interpreted as a process view as they refer to memory. However, they have not elaborated on the time dimension in more detail.

However, within service literature, in which many scholars have stressed the role of corporate images for services (de Chernatony & Dall'Omo Riley 1999), corporate images are mostly seen as relational constructions developed between the service provider and the consumer (for a review, see for example de Chernatony & Dall'Omo Riley 1999). The service literature emphasizes that services are processes co-generated with the consumer, and that "all contact-points between the consumer and the service company are moments-of-truth" (Grönroos 2000). Hence, based on Grönroos' seminal service quality model (Grönroos 1984), in which image is an element, every contact point between the consumer and the company also includes a moment-of-truth from the image perspective. In conclusion, it can be argued that Grönroos (1984) implicitly introduced both a temporal dimension and a relationship perspective to images, as the image may be influenced by both parties, and over a longer period of time.

In conclusion, based on Alvensson's (1990) and Stern, Zinkhan et al.'s (2001) proposals and Butan (1993, 73) and Grönroos (1984; 2000), consumers construct images based on relational processes over time, which are influenced by both the sender and the receiver. However, based on the present study consumers corporate images are constructed through dynamic relational processes based on a multifaceted network of earlier images from multiple sources over time'.

Although brands, brand management and branding has become what can be called a buzz term in the 21<sup>st</sup> century marketing literature, what a brand means has nowadays become diffuse (Stern 2006) as the conceptual confusion can be crystallized in the use of the concept brand as "many authors revert (explicitly or implicitly) to define the term [brand, branding] as corporate identity or corporate image" (Topalian 2003, 1121).

Although often used interchangeably, **image and brand** originally referred to different domains within image research. Kotler's definition follows the original idea, indicating the original relationship between image and brand: "brand is an offering from a known source and a brand image is the associations connected to the brand" (Kotler 2003). The American Marketing Association's defines brands as:

A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors.<sup>18</sup>

This definition has been criticized by Grönroos (2000, 286) for excluding the consumer [customer], and for not taking into account that services are processes.

The history of branded products offered by the company, some of which are still available today, can be traced back to the pre-industrialized era in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (for an overview, see e.g. Riezebos 2003), showing that originally brands were trademarks offered by companies. “The concept of the brand can be traced back to product marketing where the role of branding and brand management has been primarily to create differentiation and preference for a product or service in the mind of the consumer (Knox & Bickerton 2003, 999). Although corporate branding draws on the traditions of product branding, corporate branding is considered more complex, not only due to the requirements of interactions with multiple stakeholders (Knox & Bickerton 2003).

Stern (2006) analyzed the usage of the brand concept approaching the concept of brand based on a historical-analysis method. She emphasized that brand is one of the most ancient words in English, and appeared in marketing in 1922, referring to trade or proprietary name. Since, the variability of usage has led to different things being studied under the same name, same things under different names or a combination of the two (Stern, Zinkhan et al. 2001). Hence, a conceptual confusion as well as a specialized branding language has developed (Tybout & Charpentier 2001; Stern 2006).

The findings from Stern’s (2006) analysis on the usage of the brand concept are based on articles published in the special issue of branding research in the Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science (2006, vol. 34, number 2), based on which the conclusion can be drawn that a distinction can be done between two perspectives:

- The connotative, including the categories of mind, metaphor and process, and
- The denotative, including the categories of world, literal, and entity.

Although, as Stern points out, the sample is very small and words constantly take new meanings (Stern 2006), three ‘schools of thought’ can be identified based on the locus for brand and whether it is seen as a process or an entity.

The first school of thought (6 articles) understands brands as metaphors, constructed through a process in the minds of the evaluators, and

The second school of thought (1 article) understand brands as an entity in the real world ‘owned’ by the company, and

The third school of thought (3 articles) understands brands in an integrative way incorporating both literal and metaphorical views, entity and process.

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<sup>18</sup> [www.marketingpower.com](http://www.marketingpower.com), visited 24.5.2007

Referring to the service literature and the critique mentioned above, Grönroos (2000) defines brands from a relationship perspective as: “taking a relationship approach, brands are seen as brand relationships, which are affected by a number of brand contacts that occur during an ongoing relationship between a customer and a supplier or service provider” (2000, 285). As he specifies that “the brand as a concept is always an image” (ibid 2000, 287) formed in the consumer’s minds, the conclusion can be drawn that the prominent founder of the Nordic school of services and relationship marketing sees brands as relational and defines the concept in line with the first school of thought mentioned above, as metaphors constructed through a process in the minds of the evaluators over time.

By referring to the aforementioned discussion on *images*, also Stern, Zinkhan et al. (2001) proposed a relational definition on corporate image as being “equivalent to a multidimensional gestalt variously located in the external world and in the minds and descriptive of both state and process,” the conclusion can be drawn that it is appropriate that in the present thesis corporate brands and images are considered synonymous concepts. Brands/images are multidimensional, located as metaphor in the minds of individuals. The image is considered to be constructed through relational processes over time, influenced by both the sender and the receiver. The findings in the present study extended the definition however to also consider that images are not only constructed as relational processes influenced by both the sender and the receiver but also by other sources, like family members, friends, competitors of the company.

When having now, based on a literature review developed a consumer-focused conceptual definition for image and brand, consumer-focused views on images within corporate image research on individual, social and cultural levels are discussed.

### **2.3. Consumer-focused views within corporate image research**

Within the field of corporate image research, the consumer-focused research tradition can be divided into three (3) approaches, namely, individual, social, and cultural approaches of image research, aiming at developing an understanding of what ‘overall’ images, meanings and relationships consumers construct of products and/or companies, how can images be understood on social levels and what cultural implications do images have on culture, or, how culture influences consumers’ image constructions, in other words, how consumers think about and respond to product and/or corporate images.

Within research focusing on the individual consumer, Stern, Zinkhan et al. (2001) conclude in their analysis that conventional research within the field focuses on beliefs and feelings in a consumer’s mind stipulated by associations with the real-world entity (the company) or messages (advertising, PR, etc.) and conclude that within the field of marketing, image research has traditionally been state-oriented, whereas consumer research has been process-oriented:

- State-oriented research denotes a structure focusing on attitudes and attributes, whereas



- Process-oriented research focus on “the process by which information is represented in working memory. Consumer processing is assumed to be based on images of things, rather than on the things themselves” (Stern, Zinkhan et al. 2001, 203).

The difference between the two streams of research can be illustrated by, for example, the fact that *state-oriented* views focus on what brand communication does to people, whereas the *process-oriented* view focuses on what people do with brand communication (Gordon 2006). Hence, state-oriented views see the consumer as a passive receiver of messages, whereas the basic assumption of process-oriented views is that people are active constructors of meanings, they interact with communication, and their mind is not a blank sheet or tabula rasa onto which ‘messages can be printed’ (see for example Meenaghan 1995; Williams & Moffitt 1997; Stern, Zinkhan et al. 2001; Gordon 2006).

### 2.3.1. *State-oriented views*

Mainstream, state-oriented views on corporate images are based on the assumption that corporate images can be linked to personality traits describing the company. However, state-oriented views on corporate images are one-sided, excluding the influence of other entities, and focus on attitudes and/or attributes that can be linked to a company. Hence, the view at its extreme focuses either solely on the consumer excluding the company as a signal-sender, or, the other way around, focuses only on the organization excluding the consumer’s image construction (Stern, Zinkhan et al. 2001).

Within the view, Dowling (1988) provided an overview on how corporate images had been studied until 1988, based on the types of attributes that were measured. Already then Dowling argued that as companies ‘serve multiple publics’ who have different types of interactions with the company, these groups are also likely to have different images of the company, and hence a company may have multiple images. Accordingly, Dowling suggests that attributes used to describe the company and to be measured should be customized to reflect the specific interests of each group of ‘publics.’ Accordingly, the attributes to be measured within the stream are usually specified in advance representing the management’s view of an ideal image of the company, whereas the outcome represents the respondent’s view on how well those attributes describe the corporate personality, the “actual image” (Dowling 1988, 31). Non-attribute-based research approaches with the aim to generate a list of attributes for future research was generally exploratory qualitative approaches with unstructured interviews, usually used as a precursor to a large-scale quantitative study. Dowling suggests that simple space multidimensional scaling (MDS) probably is “the most appropriate non-attribute modeling procedure to study overall corporate images” (1988, 29). However, the aim is here also to produce attributes for describing the company.

Berens and van Riel (2004) provide a comprehensive overview of studies conducted during the last five decades and discuss the different *types* of corporate associations people may hold. Based on their analysis, there are three main streams of research within the field. The first stream of research distinguishes different types of associations on the basis of different social expectations of behavior people have regarding the

company. The second stream is based on corporate personality, distinguishing associations on the basis of different corporate personality traits people attribute to companies, and the third stream uses the concept of trust as its starting point distinguishing associations on the basis of different reasons people trust or distrust companies. In conclusion, the authors suggest that there is no specific set of corporate associations to measure. Rather, researchers or practitioners can construct their association measures based on the identified attitude streams. For example, when social desirability is crucial, the set can be chosen from the social expectations of the corporate behavior stream, and, the personality approach could be used in situations “aiming at discovering gaps in perceptions that need to be ironed out” (Berens & van Riel 2004, 175). The authors, however, recognize the limitations in their objectivistic ‘shopping list’ approach and point out that it is difficult to verify if the measured associations are important for the consumers in determining their specific corporate image, and especially, are the measures attributes important to the company’s success?

Probably the most influential state-oriented view within corporate image research tradition is Keller’s (see e.g. Keller 1993; 2003) brand equity model. Although the model is state-oriented, Keller (2003) emphasizes that the relationship between the consumer and the product is formed through a process of brand recognition, brand meaning, brand response and brand relationship. According to Keller, the process is dependent on what consumers have learned, felt, seen and heard about the brand over time. Hence, the conclusion can be drawn, that Keller sees image construction as a process, but the outcome, the image, as static. Although, all images can be considered static in the sense that they capture one point in time, but dynamic process-oriented views include the possibility of change and multiplicity, dimensions not touched upon in Keller’s model.

In the model, brand knowledge is conceptualized according to an associative network memory model in terms of two components, brand awareness and brand image (i.e., a set of brand associations). Customer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory. Brand associations are, however, tested based on the organization’s preferences aiming at discovering gaps in perceptions between the organization and the consumer (Berens and van Riel 2004). Hence, Keller’s approach is organization-, not consumer-focused.

Krishnan (1996) used a memory network model to identify and measure various association characteristics for providing insight on strong and weak areas for each brand for strengthening (measured by sales) it. However, they notice that over time consumers build up an impressive set of associations about various brands, some being associations and attributes about the brand, some representing experiences with the brand. They point out that the valence, uniqueness, and origin of these associations indicate the brand’s weak or strong areas.

Van Osselaer and Alba (2000) and Van Osselaer and Janiszewski (2001) focused on learning based on the Human Associative Memory (HAM) theory used by Keller, and additionally, an adaptive network model. They conclude that consumers combine elements from both past (HAM), present and future (adaptive network model) in their image construction processes. Lately (Warlop, Ratneshwar et al. 2005) conducted a

study on learning from a memory perspective concluding that various differentiation cues are important for remembering the product or company.

The ‘Unique Corporate Associations Valence (UCAV) approach’ (Spears, Brown et al. 2006) has been developed for revealing what specific *de facto* associations respondents have of the company on the individual level, for avoiding disadvantages of forcing or eliciting associations the individual never had (Spears, Brown et al. 2006, 5). The method integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches and is proposed as a method for revealing and measuring corporate associations.

Association research is, however, sensitive to halo effects and simple inference, as responses may be influenced by one dominant overall evaluation and it generalizes those impressions to other entities (halo effect) or, when they combine one attribute with another attribute ‘to go together’ (simple inference) (Dowling 1988; Berens & van Riel 2004). Furthermore, transfer effects are well-documented, referring to multiple images influencing each other. Dowling (2002) identified multiple potential transfer effects, namely country, industry, corporate and product image and their mutual transfer effects on each other (Dowling 2002, 189). Especially transfer effects of country-of-origin and product vs. country of origin are widely researched. Ger, Askegaard and Christensen, who studied the field with a narrative approach emphasize that these effects cannot sufficiently be studied by state-oriented views as they don’t capture, for example, the inherent richness in relevant imagery (Ger, Askegaard et al. 1999), that is, the temporal dimension in imagery. Transfer effects have also been reported by Eckhardt (2005) based on an interpretive study revealing that consumers also experience local brands as foreign if the origin of the product is foreign. For instance, a local pizza brand can be experienced as foreign due to the foreign origin of the product.

As mentioned, state-oriented views have been influential within marketing, whereas process-oriented views traditionally have been common in consumer behavior research, and especially within consumer culture theory (CCT), in which the term ‘imagery’ is also frequently used. Holt (Holt 2005) argues that traditional image research has been based on psychological models in which brand symbolism is seen as consisting of abstract association instead of considering social and cultural constructs grounded in historical contexts, as consumers understand brand symbolism in terms of concrete stories and images, not abstract associations. Moreover, Holt (2005) criticizes the conventional image research for measuring individual-level associations. According to Holt (2005), brand symbolism is powerful only when accepted and used by a large population.

In sum, traditional state-oriented research approaches focus on corporate images as end-states, constructed to a large degree based on company actions in linear ways (Cornelissen 2000) through impression formation processes (Williams & Moffitt 1997). Hence, they are static as they do not incorporate the possibilities of multidimensionality, chance and time.

Next, process-oriented views on consumer images are discussed. This genre is especially represented by the postmodern research tradition on image meaning and relationships. Characteristically, process-oriented views on images are often exploratory

and subjectivist, leaving space for the informants to express freely how they perceive the product or organization.

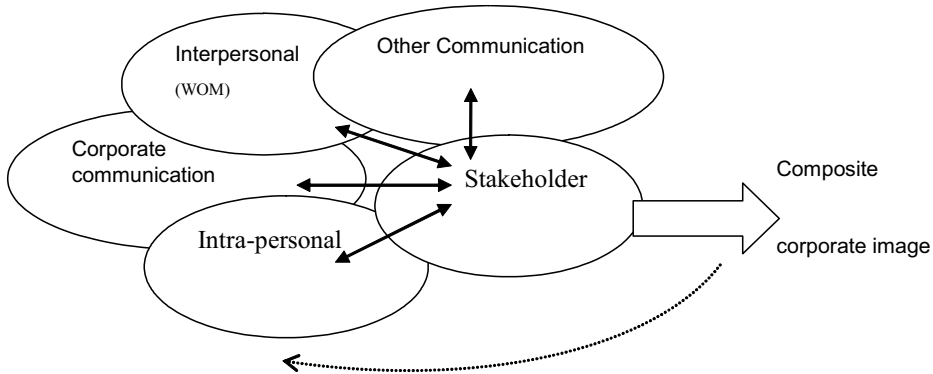
### **2.3.2. *Process-oriented views***

Process-oriented research and views on corporate images are few compared with research focusing on images as a state.

Within process research, Pettigrew (1997) points out that the driving assumption behind process thinking is that social reality is not a steady state, it is a dynamic process that occurs, develops and changes over time. Hence, for reaching an understanding on ‘the active consumer,’ it has been suggested that images should be studied from a process-oriented view (Duncan & Moriarty 1998; Cornelissen 2000; Stewart & Pavlou 2002).

Williams and Moffitt’s (1997) study provided empirical evidence on process orientation within image research emphasizing that “organizational image is a product of multiple organizational, personal and environmental factors that contributes to the construction of an overall organizational image” (255). The organization’s image was described as developing from an image construction process where audience members utilize any and all information they can access from advertising, the organization’s buildings to passing conversations with acquaintances. Williams and Moffitt (1997) suggest, with reference to a number of studies by various scholars, that “image is a product of a multiple-variable impression formation *process* located in the interaction among organizational texts, environmental and individual or personal factors” (ibid, 238).

Cornelissen (2000) suggests a structural model that pinpoints consumer-orientation, as it puts the consumer in the first place as an image constructor and the company as but one of the influencers of the corporate image. Moreover, Cornelissen’s model is considered important as he implicitly suggests a temporal dimension in the consumer’s image construction when defining images as “global impressions, attitudes and elaborated dispositions that are held *in minds* of members of the audience” (Cornelissen 2000, 120).



**Figure 6 New model of corporate communication: interactivity and multiple message sources (Cornelissen 2000, 121)**

Corporate communication includes in the model symbolism, communication and behavior of the organization. By 'other communicators' Cornelissen refers to competitors and related business. The world-of-mouth (WOM) phenomenon includes that consumers often look for recommendations from others. The intra-personal message source consists of previous experiences and images stored in memory (Cornelissen 2001). Hence, Cornelissen introduces a dynamic model with a temporal dimension for image constructions, as he considers impression to be constructed as individual, iterative and continuous processes. In conclusion, image was considered to develop as a process based on a dialogue between the organization, its consumers and the environment over time.

As was mentioned earlier, Botan (1993) emphasized a dialogical view on the interaction between the company and the consumer. Within relationship marketing, dialogue is a central topic. Grönroos (2000) emphasizes that in dialogues there are no senders and receivers of messages, but those taking part in the dialogue process. He emphasizes that one-way messages have neither been sent in order to only be received, but to be taken part with. However, Addis and Podestà's (2005) accuse relationship management approaches to be based on modernist thinking, as they encompass a dyadic reference frame. Nevertheless, a relationship approach is dynamic and includes a temporal dimension and as relationships may change, due to the dyad consisting of the aggregate of episodes between two actors and its relationship history remembered by the actors involved (Ritter & Gemunden 2003).

In postmodern image research, focusing on the consumer's own experiences and on how the audience members communicate these experiences through their brand relationships, Fournier and Yao (1997) has not considered it a necessity that both parties remember the relationship history, as she considers relationships to also exist on mental levels, so that only one party recognizes it. Fournier (1998) claims that people construct brand relationships with products, not because they like the product or the product works well, but because they benefit from the meanings the brand adds to their lives. This was illustrated in Susan Fournier's seminal article (1998) focusing on mental relationships and meanings consumers construct with, or devote to, a brand, either on

the individual level in relation to their own identity, or on social level with other people. Fournier's approach has been criticized, as interpersonal relationships require parallelism in the relationship, that is, the brand should be understood by the consumer to have a behavior from which the brand's personality is construed (Bengtsson 2003). Hence, if brands are seen as an active partner in the relationship, then the brand agency is transmitted and perceived through the marketers' everyday marketing mix decisions (Bengtsson 2003). These decisions are, however, quite standardized and hence, brand relationships should be considered 'metaphoric' relationships (Bengtsson 2003).

However, it is important to notice that from a subjectivist stance, brand relationships and meanings can be considered synonymous concepts with image. Hence, Fournier's approach has similarities with earlier studies in which involvement and motivation has been studied in relation to the degree of elaboration of the image (Petty and Cacioppo 1986; Pruyn 1990, in Cornelissen 2000).

Since the seminal article by Susan Fournier (1998), cultural and postmodern approaches for understanding brand meaning and relationships have become a research topic of interest, especially within consumer culture theory.

#### *2.3.2.1. Image meanings and image relationships*

Brand symbolism and the importance of meaning were introduced into brand and image research as early as the 1950's by Martineau (1958), Levy and Gardner (1955), and Levy (1959). Gardner and Levy pointed out the social and psychological nature and products, whereas Levy a few years later emphasized that products have symbolic significance, as the consumer cannot anymore be regarded as a rational man, as "people buy things not only for what they can do, but also for what they mean" (1959, 118). The concept of brands as social signs and building brackets in consumers' self-images is now well-established (Meenaghan 1995). Brand meaning has been defined by Morris and Martin (2000, 80) as to be comprised of both consumer perceptions or interpretations of a brand as well as the consumer's affective reaction to it. Thus the meaning evolves from both the image and the emotions a brand name evokes. However, from a subjectivist stance, the image is always an interpretation of what is experienced, not as Morris and Martin suggest a perception *or* interpretation.

Based on the symbolic meanings that are attached to a brand, consumers are using brands as a kind of language (Lannon & Cooper 1983) and the meanings of brand images operate in two directions, inwards in constructing a self-identity and outwards in constructing the social world through social-symbolism. As Lannon and Cooper suggest "brands are part of ourselves and we are part of our brands" (1983, 205), depicting a relational view on brands much before Susan Fournier's seminal article (1998) on consumer-brand relationships.

The basis of the ‘self’ can, according to Higgins (in Urde 1999<sup>19</sup>), be divided into the private self and the social self, indicating that one’s own perception of oneself is relational to how we think others perceive us. The true, ideal, and normative self are dimensions of our private and social self.

		<u><b>The self</b></u>		
		<i>The true self</i>	<i>The ideal self</i>	<i>The normative self</i>
<u><b>The basis of the self</b></u>	<i>The private self</i>	How I conceive myself	How I would like to be	How I believe I ought to be
	<i>The social self</i>	How I believe others conceive me	How I believe others would like me to be	How I believe others feel I ought to be

**Figure 7 Dimensions of identity (Higgins 1987, in Urde 1999, 129)**

Within modernism, identity was understood as something that was to be kept solid and stable, whereas from a postmodern view, identity is ever-changing and open to new influences with the aim to avoid fixation and to keep options open (Bauman 1996, 18 in Schultz, Hatch et al. 2000, 16). Postmodern views on identity regard identity to be a product of cultural and social contexts and “of the language that grants the subject position” (Schultz, Hatch et al. 2000, 16). The postmodern view on identity can be described as: “We are not one, we are many” (Ornstein 1989).

‘The self,’ in the postmodern view, is something that a person actively constructs. Accordingly, identity is hence both dynamic, perception-based (Higgins 1987), context and time dependent, but changeable according to ‘the context and whim’ (Hatch & Schultz 2003).

<sup>19</sup>Urde, M. (1999). "Brand Orientation: A Mindset for Building Brands into Strategic Resources." *Journal of Marketing Management* 15: 117-133.

Urde discussed the brand’s identity from the organization’s perspective and named the figure above as “Identity – Six questions for the Organization to Answer in Order to Get to Know and Understand its Brand” (129). Urde’s argumentation is based on the assumption that the image of the brand is to a large extent defined by how the organization perceives itself, and on to what extent customers agree with the organization’s perceptions of itself.

The threats of postmodern experiences on identity are, however, fragmentation, loss of meaning and loss of individuality. When the self-identity is no longer stable, but require active construction, brands can offer consistency in an ever-changing world (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998). Meaningfulness is vital to the creation, continuation and communication of the self, and as Wattanasuwan (2005) argues, 'micro meanings' are valuable for everyday life.

However, the post-modern paradigm is premised upon the idea that brands will be more valuable if they are offered, not as cultural blueprints but as cultural resources, as useful ingredients to produce the self as one chooses (Holt 2002). Interpretive studies have demonstrated that individuals value brand symbolism as material in their identity constructs, not as knowledge structures. Holt (2005) argues that symbols are valued when their meanings are inter-subjectively shared with others and can be used to interact with others. In other words, cognitive representations are caused by inter-subjective meanings, not vice versa. Escalas (2004) emphasizes that narratives told by the consumers are one means through which self-brand connections are formed. She argues that narratives reveal meanings ascribed to products and brands, user and usage associations and psychological and symbolic benefits of the brand.

Brand meanings and relationships also live on after our death. Wattanasuwan (unpublished working-paper) explored how the living hold on to the deceased through memories of the brands the deceased once consumed. The phenomenon explored is a paper-burning ritual performed among Chinese Thai at funerals in order to send essential things in paper format miniatures to the deceased so that he/she could continue with his/her lifestyle afterlife. Wattanasuwan suggest, based on the study, that memories of the deceased are strongly related to the brands and consumption activities of the deceased. Hence, she argues, brands also represent our identities in the eyes of others and through brands we are able to immortalize the identities of the deceased symbolically (ibid). In other words, people's brand relationships can become symbols and remainders of their identities to others. Moreover, an intergenerational influence on consumption and brand preferences may occur and transferred from one generation to the next within the family, especially in collectivism and extended family living arrangements (Moore & Wilkie 2005), as in the Chinese Thai families. In conclusion, from a postmodern perspective consumers are understood as the active and creative consumer 'searching for identity through consumption,' who uses the symbolic meanings of brand images to construct, maintain and express each of his/her multiple identities. In other words, we employ consumption, not only to create and sustain the self, but also to locate us in the society ((for an overview of the self and symbolic consumption, see Wattanasuwan 2005). However, do we accept the organization's definition of the brand? Firat and Venkatesh (1995) suggest that the postmodern criticism on modernism is a critique on the view of the consumer as merely a cognitive agent using repressive rational/technological schemata in life. The postmodern view is multidimensional opposing a dichotomous categorization, in other words, ideas of culture, language, esthetics, symbolic modes and literary expression and meanings are considered essential in economy and science. However, the temporal or change dimension, which is central in process views according to Pettigrew (1997), has not been studied. Nevertheless, insight on that consumers actively construct images and meanings in relational ways over time is important, as they indicate that the company



does not control consumer images but needs to explore them from a consumer perspective.

Next, social and cultural approaches of image research will be discussed.

#### *2.3.2.2. Social and cultural approaches of image research*

Within image research, culture as a context can be studied from two perspectives. First, how culture influences consumers' image constructions, meanings and relationships, and, second, how consumer images actively construct culture. Studies have been conducted on organizational (see for example Hatch & Schultz 2001), social (see for example O'Guinn & Muniz 2005) and society level (see for example Wattanasuwan 2005).

On the organizational level, culture refers to the everyday organizational life as it is experienced within an organization by the members of the organization (Schultz, Hatch et al. 2000), also referred to as corporate culture or internal corporate culture. On the social level, culture refers to brand communities and on the society level the influence a brand can have in changing a culture.

Social level image research refers to the brand community phenomenon, where a brand community is the foundation of group identification (McAlexander, Schouten et al. 2002) and in contrast, when a sub-culture-group adopts a brand and specifies its meaning (Kates 2004). When consumers become 'dedicated fans' to a certain brand to the extent that the brand usage and meaning can be characterized as 'subcultures of consumption' ((Schouten & McAlexander 1995) or 'brand cult' (Belk & Tumbat forthcoming), a brand community may develop. A brand community, such as Harley-Davidson motorcycles and Apple computers, has been defined as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muniz & O' Guinn 2001). The meaning of the brand and degree of loyalty to the community members has been characterized from the extreme of brand religions to looser brand community metaphors. Brand religions, characterized by Belk et al (forthcoming) are phenomena of extreme belief in a brand and all-encompassing role that the brand can play in the consumers' lives. Based on their research on Macintosh computers, it can be argued that the 'fan's' brand relationship has not only become a brand religion to the user's, but also more generally, a cultural phenomenon in some societies.

From the marketer's perspective, O'Guinn and Muniz (2005, 268) have posed the critical question of 'who owns the brand?' They point out that community members act as social collectives, which destabilize the marketplace power. The brand is continually co-created by the community and the marketer through continuous creative and interpretive actions of the community. Hence, brands with brand communities, the brand is socially constructed and negotiated between the two actors, the community and the marketer. O'Guinn and Muniz (2005, 269) argue, however, that "all brands convey complex meanings to others, meanings that are continually negotiated between the marketer and consumers," not only in all contact points between the marketer and the consumer (Grönroos 2000), but also through cultural and social influences.

Brand communities can be characterized through three dimensions: consciousness of kind, evidence of rituals and traditions, and a sense of obligation to the community and its members. Consciousness of kind appears when a group of people feels a collective similarity to one another and the group, and a collective difference both individually and collectively from other groups (O'Guinn and Muniz 2005, 256). The brand also stands for shared beliefs, which consumers like to recognize (O'Guinn & Muniz 2005). Rituals and traditions in brand communities serve to "reify the community and its culture" (O'Guinn and Muniz 2005, 257). As O'Guinn and Muniz (*ibid*) have pointed out, the power of a brand community for brand loyalty lies much in the social relationships and communal sensibilities and forces.

But the reverse, within an existing community, how does a brand attain social fitness? Kates (2004) conducted an ethnographic study in a non-brand-focused context (gay men's community) and argues that legitimate brand meanings may serve to "enhance and dramatize issues of interest and importance to human communities" (*ibid*, 462). Legitimate brand meanings have traditionally been conceptualized as being comprised of enduring and reified meanings as residing in the local community and inside the brand (*ibid*). Kates suggests that legitimate brand meaning should be understood as dynamic continuing social processes in which consumers negotiate shared, constrained by institutionalized – but still malleable – meanings, associated with previous contexts and the brand itself (2004). Weick (1976) has pointed out that in social settings, group members may try to negotiate a collective interpretation of the matter in focus. Having consensually made the enacted environment more sensible, the members then store their revised and presumably more homogeneous cause maps for imposition on future similar circumstances (1976, 141-144). From this perspective, brand meanings are to be understood as socially constructed entities through negotiated shared meanings over time, with the locus in-between the marketer and the market. "Thus legitimacy occurs when consumers become convinced that their brands and they have matching baggage" (Kates, 2004, 464).

Macro-level brand agency refers to cultural changes due to foothold of a certain brand and the culture this brand stands for, such as eating habits through McDonald's hamburger chain or changes in values and beliefs through Disney World Production's films and products. Often this phenomenon is called with reference to the origin of those brands in question that has got a foothold in the marketplace and in the culture, for example, 'americanization' of the culture. Hence, we can see that culture is constantly formed and reformed by commerce; "marketing is a socially embedded and culturally very influential phenomenon" (Firat 2005).

Community construction by brand relationships not only constructs communities, they may as well express resistance to other sub-cultures. Kates (2000; 2004) noticed in her study with an ethnographic approach, how brand relationships construct gay communities also as resistance to 'the others.' Anti-branding movements also spun, for example, from Naomi Klein's book "No logo" (2003). It can be regarded as social and cultural level brand meanings when communities consuming un-branded products are formed or cultural level changes, if consumers become aware of the role brands play in their lives and change consumption due to the phenomenon.

Consumer agency in producing brand meanings and usage independently of the global corporations' strategic intentions is an illustration of the potential importance and impact of the 'public image' of the brand and shows how single brands can influence and change basic cultural institutions and spark off a whole discourse on cultural change patterns (ibid). Hence, agency appears to emerge in relation, not as a quality of either the subject or the object (Borgerson 2005).

From a critical point of view, however, as Wattanasuwan (2005) has pointed out, "striving to create self through symbolic consumption may also enslave us in the illusive world of consumption" (179). On the one hand, brand loyalty at a high 'religious' level may blind us for better, for example, technological alternatives or, as can be seen in youth culture, only some brands and styles are approved.

In cross-cultural examinations, differences in behavior are presumed to be dependent on cultural differences in values and attitudes among people from different cultures. These values and attitudes can change depending on situational and contextual factors. Culture-related behavioral inclinations are not ever-present, but are transitory (see Briley and Aaker 2006 for a review). Aaker and Briley (2006) suggest that culture-specific patterns of behavior can be present in some situations, but weak or absent in others, and that there is evidence to indicate that cultural preferences, often assumed to be relatively stable and driven by culture-based norms and traditions, may in fact be relatively malleable. In high involvement and high need-for-closure conditions, consumers seemed to rely more heavily on their natural cultural tendencies than in opposite conditions (ibid).

The branding and image culture in the postmodern (western) world has been criticized frequently and from many perspectives. Putting aside political and social 'macro' criticism, like the Islamic fundamentalists' critique against 'the americanization' of societies through (among other things) the role of consumption and brands, Naomi Klein has expressed the most well-known critique against the domain of brand and image management in her book "No Logo" (Klein 2003). Her main critique is addressed towards international 'success brands' like Nike for not only striving for economical, but also social and cultural power. However, and as a summary on social and cultural level image research, postmodern image research adds to our understanding that image constructions are influenced by social settings. Brand meanings change from community to community and from one culture to another. A crucial question is: how many individuals are needed for a brand community? Is two enough or should they be 200 or 2000? Presumably, brand communities also exist among small groups and the consumers' image constructions in these social settings could be successfully studied.

### ***2.3.3. Summary on consumer-focused image research***

To summarize, state-oriented views on images are based on cognitive psychology, which views "the consumer as a rational decision maker working his way through a series of physical and mental steps toward the act of purchase" (Meenaghan 1995, 29). Cognitive theorists stress resistance to change and fragmentation for avoiding dissonance (Lannon & Cooper 1983). This, often modernist, view on consumers has been challenged by a postmodern view emphasizing meanings and relationships

consumers actively construct with images through symbolic, intuitive and emotional dimensions as the basis for their decision making. In this view “the consumer is seen as active, knowledgeable, sophisticated and involved in the process of giving meaning to brands” (Meenaghan 1995, 29) also based on social settings.

The major implication of the postmodern research stream on images is that it is acknowledged that companies do not control consumers’ images to the degree that has previously been supposed in mainstream brand and image management literature (Thompson 2004). On the contrary, brands are considered to be socially constructed constellations of meaning, negotiated between marketers and consumers and with implications for both parties as well as for the marketplace and society at large. Brands are everywhere, and this ubiquity enhances the importance of understanding them and their meaning for individuals, societies and cultures (O’Guinn & Muniz 2005). The dynamisms in social relations within and between cultures imply that consumers’ image constructions should be studied accordingly, as dynamic processes.

Among numerous researchers, a search for a central theory that bridges all the perspectives together has been on the agenda for long (Urde 2003) as the various perspectives complement and bring new angles to the understanding on how consumers construct images (Cornelissen 2000) and into the meanings images have in the consumers’ life. New findings and understanding within neuroscience represents new scientific frameworks for understanding subjective experience (Solms & Turnbull 2002) and can therefore provide new knowledge on the consumers’ image constructions to be applied within corporate image research in marketing.

Next, organization-focused views on images are discussed.

## **2.4. Organization-focused views on corporate images**

Organization-focused image research and concepts are to a large extent built upon the notion that corporate images mirrors the corporate or product identity defined by the company. From this perspective, the main focus is on *managing* internal and external identity, branding, and image processes focusing on “what the organisation should do with its brands” (Bengtsson & Östberg 2006).

### ***2.4.1. Conceptual developments and schools of thought***

The interest in corporate images and brands has increased among academics and practitioners over the last decades (Markwick and Fill, 1997), resulting in numerous new concepts, approaches, models and terminologies (Schultz 2002; Cornelissen & Elving 2003), but there is also a lack of consensus on the precise meaning of many of the concepts (for an overview, see e.g. Balmer 2001). As early as 1989, Abratt (in Balmer 2001) concluded, “despite the voluminous literature the concepts remain unclear and ambiguous as no universal accepted definitions have emerged.”(252). The terminological confusion has been described through the analogy of ‘Tower of Babel,’ by Hatch and Schultz (2000) and ‘fog’ by Balmer (2001). Balmer outlined 15 explanations for fog in his extensive exploration of the key concepts corporate brand,

corporate identity, organizational identity, corporate reputation and corporate communications, suggesting that they are elements of a new strategic ‘corporate marketing mix’ (2001).

Confusing and contradictory definitions (Christie 2002) and synonymous use of concepts (Knox & Bickerton 2003) makes it difficult and adventurous to navigate in these waters. As such, energy from systematic empirical work on the topics is wasted (Cornelissen and Elving, 2003). Moreover, inconsistent usage of the concepts prevents theory development within the field “as a formal language system is fundamental to the full formalization of a theory” (Stern, Zinkhan et al. 2001).

National differences also occur in the use of concepts and can be traced back to paradigmatic differences between the regions. For example, scholars from the Nordic countries, especially those with paradigmatic roots in the Nordic school of service management and relationship marketing can be expected to focus on the relational view of image research, whereas the ‘French school of corporate identity’ define “corporate identity as a concept that integrates and surpasses the notion of culture, and focuses on an elaboration their specific analytical tools” (Moingeon & Ramanantsoa 1997, 383). They argue, that what one can see is only a part of the organization’s identity and emphasize that the principal objective of the French identity school is to gain access to a better understanding of the *functioning and internal dynamics* of organizations. This understanding is mainly gathered by examining the organizational culture and its symbolic products, the organizational imagery. The French school approach is multidisciplinary, as it integrates theory from sociology and psychology and uses socio-analysis to study corporate identity (Moingeon & Ramanantsoa 1997). Thus, the French school of thought takes a broad view on the identity concept. Additionally, the French conception of corporate identity is related to the concept of corporate image because it addresses internal images represented by the perception that employees have of their organization. Therefore, within the French school of identity the temporal dimension in images is relevant as it is part of the identity concept.

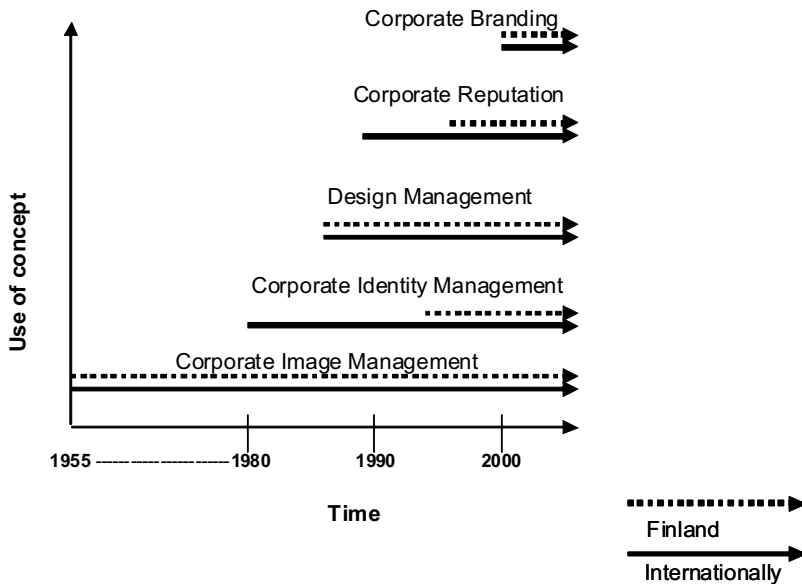
The ‘re-naming process’ and which concept is held ‘in particular affection at any one point in time’ internationally (Balmer & Greyser 2003) is illustrated in Figure 8. As a comparison, a dotted line indicates an approximation on how the concepts have been favored in a Finnish business context, based on my own experience during the nearly last 20 years within the field. Corporate image management<sup>20</sup> and corporate brand management<sup>21</sup> have followed the international mainstream usage, but corporate identity was in fashion mostly during the 1990’s. In the late 1990’s there was a burst for reputation<sup>22</sup> management, a concept that quite quickly was overruled by the concept brand. Design Management, with the emphasis on product design as an image strategy for a company, has in the Finnish context remained a powerful concept among designers since it was introduced in Finland in the late 80’s.

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<sup>20</sup> In Finnish ‘Yrityskuvan hallinta ja kehittäminen’

<sup>21</sup> In Finnish ‘Yritysbändi’

<sup>22</sup> In Finnish ‘Maineen hallinta’



**Figure 8** Historiography on concepts used within corporate image research internationally and in Finnish business context (Modified and developed based on Balmer and Greyser 2003)

Corporate image management as the original concept had to make room for corporate identity management in the late 1970's due to an emphasis on understanding the identity mix viewpoint as a source for managing the corporate image. The move towards the reputation concept is often justified by the bad connotations image has, and that reputation is formed over time and is based on what the organization has done and how it has behaved (Balmer & Greyser 2003). Today the concept in favour is corporate brand.

The lack of consensus is not only an academic concern. As noticed by Markkanen (1999), "the need for a conceptual consensus becomes evident the more acquainted with the literature from the field one gets, and the more one works with executives within the field (18).

In conclusion, since the 1950's, conventional organization-focused views within corporate image research have been conceptualized in various ways during the last five decades. Despite the confusion and re-naming, the concepts used address more or less the same constellation, the organization and its image and how this relationship can be managed in favourable ways from the organization's perspective. Despite the confusing situation, Balmer (2001) sees the field as one of growing interest and maturity, and refers to Watershoot, "the making of listings of taxonomies is one of the primary tasks in the development of a new body of thought" (1995, 438). Despite the changes, all the terms still occur in the literature. Although some authors (Van Riel and Balmer 1997;)

argue that a maturity in conceptualizations and the use of the concepts already has been reached, new voices urging for consensus has emerged (Balmer, 2001; Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

Knox and Bickerton (2003) distinguished, based on their analysis of the academic contributors' approach within the field of research from the 1950's until 2000's, that scholars with a marketing approach had a consumer focus, whereas management scholars had a multidisciplinary approach. Hence, the focus for marketers has been on the corporate identity, primarily to be found in the consultancy practice and marketing, whereas management scholars focus on organizational identity (Schultz, Hatch et al. 2000). Schultz has argued that marketers' consumer focus is, however, to a large extent, based on behavioural psychology, which does not attempt to grasp the essence in a new marketplace (Schultz 2006).

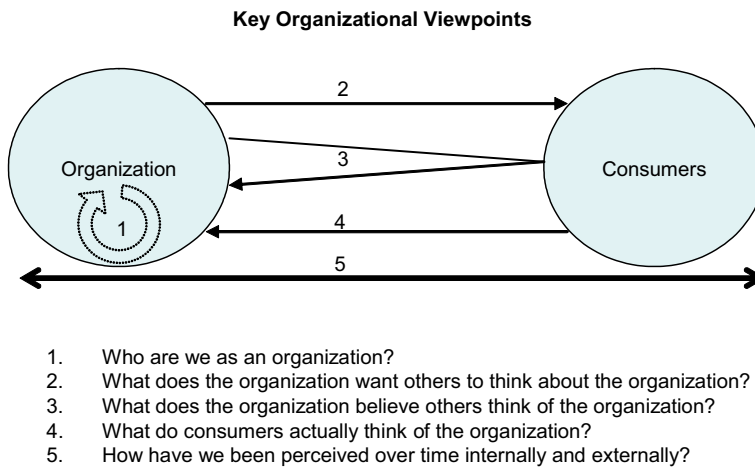
#### ***2.4.2. Basic logic, key viewpoints, and core concepts***

On a general level, Lambert depicted the basic logic of corporate image management through his famous iceberg model in 1988 (Alessandri 2001), which has since been used by a number of researchers and practitioners for the purpose of giving an overview of the concepts involved (Moingeon & Ramanantsoa 1997). In the model, the whole iceberg depicts the organizational identity, emphasizing that those parts under sea level represent organizational identity un-visible for consumers, and those parts above sea level represent corporate identity/target image/profile, based on which consumers construct their corporate images. It is believed that everything a company does and communicates, including unplanned messages like word of mouth (Duncan & Moriarty 1998) or even silence (Gioia, Corley et al. 2002; Finne 2004), can become a message with varying impacts on the organization's corporate image, regardless if planned by the organization or not.

In general, organizational identity has been the focus within management studies and corporate identity within marketing. However, within the fields identity and image and their interplay has traditionally been understood differently. Management scholars focus on understanding "how individuals in organization perceive and categorize themselves as members of a group, an organization, or a larger encompassing community" (Ravasi & van Rekom 2003, 119). Moreover, within marketing, image represents the consumer's view of the company, whereas within organizational studies image is understood as how the organization thinks others perceive them. However, also in marketing, realists measure image as a reflection of identity, whereas relativists see it as a genuine consumer concept. However, as the organizations have become more transparent than ever before, the 'sea level' depicted in the iceberg model depicting a distinction between organizational and corporate identity has began to blur (Hatch & Schultz 2003), which outdates the analogy of an iceberg.

Based on a literature review on the field, Brown, Dacin et al. (2006) found four dominant organizational viewpoints, which they developed into a general framework and formed the questions to which the viewpoints refer. In Figure 9 these general viewpoints and questions are questions 1 to 4. As they described, all viewpoints are based on mental associations of the organization (Brown, Dacin et al. 2006). The

temporal dimension in those mental associations was added into the framework as viewpoint and question number 5. The timeline indicates that all organizational viewpoints found by Brown, Dacin et al. have a temporal dimension, thereby Figure 9, presents a further developed framework for key organization-focused viewpoints.



Developed based on Brown, Dacin et al. 2006

**Figure 9 Key organization-focused viewpoints in corporate image research**

On a conceptual level, an organization's identity concerns can be explicated by:

The first question (1) "Who are we as an organization?" referring to the concept organizational identity, with its roots in the management literature.

The second (2) question, "What does the organization want others to think about the organization?" refers to the corporate identity concept, with its roots in marketing and visual identity literature, "How the organization is visualized to consumers", has roots in the graphic designers and practitioners traditions (Balmer, 2001). Within corporate identity management, visual identity and integrated marketing communications are at the core for strategic and operational marketing.

The third (3) question, "What does the organization members believe others think of the organization?" refers to the social side of organizational identity, indicating that the way organization members believe, for example, that consumers perceive the company influences the organization's own perception of its identity.



The fourth (4) question, “What do consumers actually think of the organization?” refers to the concept corporate image or, more often nowadays, corporate brand [image] describing mental associations about the organization, actually held by consumers.

The fifth (5) question, “How have we been perceived over time internally and externally?” depicts the temporal dimension in image constructions on the individual level, both internally and externally. Brown, Dacin et al. (2006) point out that all viewpoints are however based on mental associations, namely images.

The first three questions will be discussed based on the identity concept. Question number four (4) refers to the consumers’ view of the company, the image, and represents the overall research problem for the present study and is therefore in focus for discussion throughout the study and especially in 2.3. in the thesis. Question number five (5) represents the specified research problem, the temporal dimension, which is conceptualized within the framework of the present study.

In the next discussion the three first questions will be discussed.

#### *2.4.2.1. Identity and identity mix*

As the other concepts within corporate image research, organizational and corporate identity have attracted considerable attention from both academics and practitioners, whose efforts to explain, control, and/or exploit it offers a multiplicity of issues, concepts and theoretical perspectives. The multidisciplinary identity domain is maybe the crossing point in which most clearly fields of business studies not only meet and combine approaches, but also diversify the field, namely management studies, marketing, strategy and organizational communication (Schultz, Hatch et al. 2000; Balmer 2001), often referred to as the identity mix.

In an attempt for congruence, Balmer (2001) proposed the term ‘business identity’ as an ‘umbrella term’ to cover the identity mix and suggested his AC<sup>3</sup>ID TEST™ (Balmer & Greyser 2003, 251) for conceptualizing and bridging both the sender and the receiver viewpoints based on six identity dimensions, namely, actual identity, ideal identity, communicated identity, desired identity, conceived identity for constructing a covenanted identity (corporate brand).

From a marketing perspective, the concept of organizational identity is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, understanding how the organization perceives itself sets the scene for strategic, organizational and communicational contexts and creates opportunities to use it as part of the organization’s unique value proposition (Knox & Bickerton 2003) and differentiation strategies (Hatch & Schultz 2003).

What is identity? In 2002, a number of prominent identity researchers outlined some fundamental issues for theory construction and empirical research within organizational identity theory. Ravasi and van Rekom (2003) summarized as one fundamental issue the various intellectual roots of identity.

One of the roots, stemming from and using psychological terminology is the individually oriented 'personality' analogy, referring to what the person really is (Bromley 2001), comparatively "What the organization really is." For example, Temporal and Alder (1998) argued that the company's personality is the true identity of the company, making it unique and influencing consumers' and employers' behavior, accordingly, heavily influencing the profitability of the company (14). An organization's personality is thus the content of all the functions, strategies, products and communications taking place within a certain organization, which can, according to Bromley (2001), be defined based on the set of attributes that distinguishes the organization from another, especially organizations of the same sort (Bromley, 2001). In conclusion, on the corporate level, identity can be conceptualized as 'what the organization really is' and 'what distinguishes it from other organizations.' Accordingly, the identity of an organization can be studied measured based on the attributes that describe its personality.

However, the sense of self is largely grounded in the perceptions of others (Mead 1934, in Ravasi & van Rekom 2003). This line of thinking differs from the traditional marketing view in which identity refers to the organization and image to the consumers' perceptions per se. Nevertheless and paradoxically, as was mentioned earlier, also within marketing image is usually studied from the organization's perspective, hence being a reflection of what the organization thinks others think of it, rather than reflecting what the consumers genuinely perceive the company to be. However, Urde (1999) has suggested that brand meanings and images operate in two directions: inwards in constructing a self-identity and outwards in constructing the social world through social-symbolism. He argues that based on the six identity questions depicted in Figure 10 proposed by Higgins (1987, in Urde 1999), an organization can get to know and understand its identity. Urde's argumentation is based on the assumption that corporate images are to a large extent defined by how the organization perceives itself, and to what extent consumers agree with the organization's perceptions of itself.

Higgins model is, however, static as it does not take into consideration past times. Puusa (2007), for example, suggests that there are temporal differences in how employees might conceive the company in comparison to how the management conceives it. Based on her study, the employees' perceptions of the company's identity were anchored in past and present times whereas the management focused on the future.

		Past times	Present time		Future
		<u>The self</u>			
		<i>The past self</i>	<i>The true self</i>	<i>The normative self</i>	<i>The ideal self</i>
<u>The basis of the self</u>	<i>The private self</i>	How did I conceive myself earlier	How I conceive myself	How I believe I ought to be	How I would like to be
	<i>The social self</i>	How do I believe others conceived me earlier	How I believe others conceive me	How I believe others feel I ought to be	How I believe others would like me to be

**Figure 10 Dimensions of identity extended with a temporal dimension (Developed based on Higgins 1987, Urde 1999, Puusa 2007)**

Following Mead's line of thinking that the sense of self is largely grounded in the perceptions of others, Dutton and Dukerich (2004/1991) focused on the identity process based on how environments and organizations relate to each other over time, concluding that an organization's identity describes what its members believe to be its character, whereas an organization's image describes insiders' assessments of what outsiders think of it and use to distinguish it. Dutton and Dukerich suggest that members of an organization "keep one eye on the organizational mirror when they interpret, react, and commit to organizational actions" (ibid, 219). Based on Puusa (2007) and Dutton and Dukerich's (1991) study, Higgins' model can be extended with a temporal dimension depicting the past self as a new category, with the questions 'How did I conceive myself?' and 'How do I believe others conceived me?' As Belk has pointed out, our sense of past as well as sense of future enriches our sense of self (Belk 1991).

Although psychological aspects on identity have been in focus since 1963 (Riley in Bromley 2001), and 'personality' is often used to depict the organization's identity (see e.g., Marckwick and Fill 1997; Bromley 2001), Balmer (2001) argues in line with Gioia (in Balmer 2001) that despite clear benefits, also dangers occur when comparing human identity with an organization's identity, as it is natural that an organization consists of a multiplicity of identities but an individual's identity is much more limited (ibid). Balmer's argumentation is in clear contrast to the probably most influential view on organizational identity proposed by Stuart Albert and David Whetten in 1985 (in Hatch & Schultz 2004), formulated as a question and answer:

A particular kind of question. The question, "What kind of organization is this?" refers to features that are arguably core, distinctive, and enduring. These features reveal the identity of the organization (2004/1985, 116).

Within the field, the central features of an organizational identity have become: what is core, distinctive and enduring in an organization, indicating implicitly a temporal dimension of organizational identity. Considering the relationship between identity and image recognized by most scholars (Schultz, Hatch et al. 2000), also image should incorporate a temporal dimension when following Albert and Whetten's classical definition of organizational identity.

From a postmodern view, identity is seen as the product of cultural and social contexts and of the language that grants the subject position (Hatch & Schultz 2000, 16). 'The self,' in the postmodern view, is something that a person actively constructs and negotiates according to "context and whim" (Hatch and Schultz 2000, 16). Therefore, identity is not seen as core, distinctive and enduring, as Albert and Whetten (1985) have defined. Implicitly, the postmodern view reduces organizational control on identity and image, whereas Albert and Whetten's view increases it and suggests ways of managing not only identity but also image.

Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) have pointed out that, on the individual level, the threats of postmodern experiences of identity is fragmentation, loss of meaning and loss of individuality, and when the self-identity is no longer stable but require active construction, brands can offer consistency in an ever-changing world (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998). On the corporate level, the branding process and identification with the company are important, although frequent changes are obvious. As a solution, Gioia, Schultz et al (2000) have suggested the concept of "adaptive instability in identity indicating that the identity is potentially precarious and unstable notion, frequently up for redefinition and revision by organizational members" (2000, 64).

In conclusion, organizational identity is an important issue for organizations describing 'what the company is,' thus cutting across and unifying many different organizational goals among which a coherent corporate image and reputation is one. Temporal and Alder (1998, 14). Consumers' corporate images are assumed to be grounded in organizational identity. However, before an organization can express itself to its audiences, it is essential for the organization to have a clear understanding of its personality (Markwick & Fill 1997). Therefore, understanding an organization's identity requires awareness not only on its presence, but also of its past. To cite an example, many authors point to the importance of knowing oneself as an organization (in Moingeon and Ramanantsoa 1997) including the organization's history as an important part of corporate identity (Balmer 2001). Identity is the product of history (Moingeon and Ramanantsoa 1997) and in every culture narratives have been used throughout history to depict its history to new generations. Narratives have also become a way for companies to tell about their origin, the founders and important events in the company's history including, not only the past but also the future strategic plans. Through narratives a shared visions of the future can be created as "it is stories of identity-narratives that help individuals think about and feel who they are, where they come from and where they are headed" (Gardner 1995, 43 in Shaw 2000, 194). Narratives, as well as myths, rites and taboos are building brackets in the 'who we are' constructions on the individual as well as the organizational level (see e.g., Moingeon and Ramanantsoa 1997).

As organizational identity mainly focuses on how to understand the organization's identity, **corporate identity** focuses on how the company wants to project itself to various consumers.

A selection of various authors' definitions of corporate identity is presented next in Table 2. However, corporate identity also has a multidisciplinary foundation (Balmer, 2001) and can be rooted in both management and marketing literature (Hatch and Schultz 2002, 12). In short, the concept of corporate identity stands for both the identity and the identification of a company. A selection of definitions is presented next.

**Table 2 Definitions on corporate identity by selected authors**

Author	Definition on corporate identity
British Standard Institution, 1995 (in Topalian 2003, 1119)	Corporate identity is the articulation of what an organization is, what it stands for, what it does and how it goes about its business (especially the way it relates to its stakeholders and the environment).
Van Riel & Balmer, 1997	Indicates the way a company presents itself through behavior, as well as through symbolism, to internal and external audiences. It is rooted in the behavior of individual firm members, expressing the firm's "awareness over time", 'distinctiveness' and 'centrality'
Hatch and Schultz (2000, 13)	Corporate identity can be understood as the central or distinctive idea of the organization and how this idea is represented and communicated to the variety of audiences.
Melewar and Karaosmanoglu (2006, 864)	Corporate identity is the presentation of an organization to every stakeholder. It is what makes an organization unique and it incorporates the organization's communication, design, culture, behavior, structure, industry identity and strategy. It is thus intrinsically related to both the corporate personality and image.
Kotler (2003, p. 326)	Identity comprises the ways that a company aims to identify or positioning itself or its product.

Organizational and corporate identity are, hence, concepts that overlap in their definitions in that some scholars see organizational identity as part of corporate identity.

Corporate identity can be regarded as synonymous to branding, as both concepts aim to establish a favorable image with an organization's stakeholders for gaining more sales of the company's products and services and more investments in the company (Van Riel 1997). As Hatch and Schultz have pointed out, a recognized and distinctive corporate identity offers added value and better margins to an organization when products and services become increasingly indistinguishable (Hatch and Schultz 2000).

In traditional corporate identity management, models span from corporate identity seen as an effective strategic management tool with increasing complexity and a variety of variables needed to be taken into account systematically (Balmer, 2002) to the interdisciplinary paradigm where the identity refers to an organization's unique characteristics rooted in the behaviour of members of the organization (van Riel & Balmer, 1997). The models extend further to a paradigm where corporate identity management is seen mainly as an integrated communications paradigm, concentrating on matters of corporate communications and graphic design (van Riel & Balmer, 1997), or only as the symbols and nomenclature an organization uses to identify itself to people (Dowling, 2002, p.19) or even solely as a company's nomenclature (Alessandri 2001). Hence, corporate identity can be seen as the whole company's existence with its history, personality, all actions and future plans and visions.

Alessandri (2001) reviewed definitions on corporate identity over time and found two streams of thinking. First, the strategic school of corporate identity (Balmer 1995, in Hatch and Schultz 2000, 13) as many authors argue (Markkanen 1999; Dowling 1994 and 2001; Balmer 2001; Temporal and Alder 1998; Vos 2000; Alessandri 2001) corporate identity should be seen as a strategic organizational issue handled by company executives. Second, the visual school on identity, focusing on tangible assets such as the corporate name, logo and tagline, defines corporate identity as "the symbols and nomenclature an organization uses to identify itself to people" (Dowling 2002, 19). Hence, the operational visual school on identity focuses on visible and tangible manifestations of the corporation, leadership behavior, company structure, nomenclature, design of products and other visible features that can be regarded as expressing the identity of the corporation (Balmer 1995; Hatch and Schultz 2000). The focus is on creating an appeal to the company for gaining a favorable corporate image. Schmitt and Simonson (1997) have renamed the operational approach to the 'look and feel' of the organization as also sound, touch, and smell have been added to the corporate identity mix (Hatch and Schultz 2000, 3). Hence, the visual approach has developed to a 'total experience' approach.

In contrast to the strategic school's claim that visual identity has a role in communicating the corporate strategy (van Riel & Balmer 1997), it has been claimed that the visual identity both creates and implements corporate identity (Schmitt and Simonson 1997) as "the company's identity symbols represent the visual manifestation of the organization's desired image" (Dowling 1994, 125). The relationship between visual identity and image is to create awareness and/or trigger recognition of the organization, and to activate an already stored image of the organization in people's minds (Dowling 1994). Corporate image is, according to Dowling, a far wider and more complex concept than visual identity symbols used to identify the organization. As Moingeon and Ramanantsoa (1997) argue, more than just a look in a person's passport is needed to know the identity of a person; it requires long discussions and knowledge of their history.

In addition to the visual school, a Design Management stream developed in the 1990's as one approach of corporate identity. Originally the concept included product design (often called industrial design), communication design (including graphic design), spatial design (interior and architectural design) and the behavior of the company. The aim was to harmonize messages sent by the organization for achieving congruence in

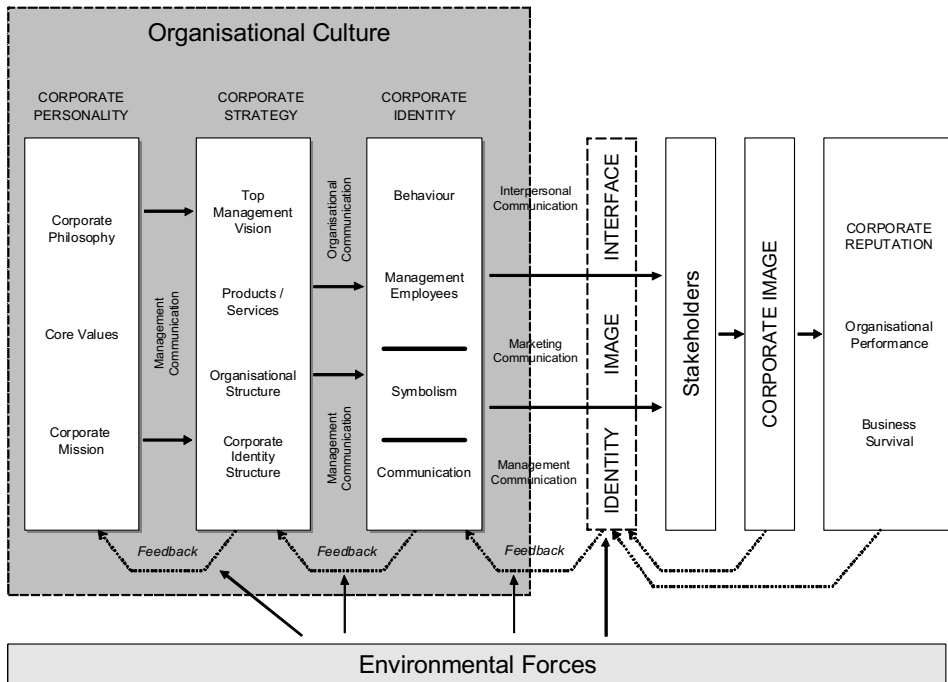
corporate images. Nowadays design management is seen as a strategic marketing approach used basically by designers for enhancing the importance of product design. As both concepts are rooted in practical marketing, variation in the definition exists due to the interests of the speaker. For example, different design management consultants and design studios define the concepts in ways that suit their interests.

In the traditional corporate identity management mix, consistency and coherence in all actions has been one of the main ideas in order to harmonize the messages the organization is sending. The purpose has been to gain an image as close to the targeted image as possible and numerous models have been presented for managing an organization's identity mix (see e.g., Stuart 1999; Alessandri 2001; Balmer 2001b; Cornelissen 2003; Abratt et al. 2003). In reviews on central models of the corporate identity mix (see e.g. Balmer 2001; Abratt and Mofokeng 2001; Stuart 1999), some author's models have become cornerstones in the theory development within the field. Kennedy (1977) has proposed central models on corporate image formation, Dowling's model (1986) on the image formation process, Abratt's model (1989) on corporate image management, van Riels model (1995) on the corporate program and the corporate identity model by Balmer (1998).

However, Stuart (1999) developed a comprehensive model of corporate identity management<sup>23</sup>, based on the models mentioned above by taking into account all the significant features and current thinking, which is presented in Figure 11 as it sums up previous thinking within the field.

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<sup>23</sup> Stuart calls the model corporate identity management as she follows the identity tradition of conceptualizing corporate identities and images. Hence, the model could as well have been called corporate brand management or corporate image management.



**Figure 11 Helen Stuart's model of the corporate identity management process (Stuart 1999, 205)**

According to Stuart (1999) the model depicts following elements:

- *Corporate personality* consists of the corporate philosophy, the corporate values and the corporate mission.
- *Corporate strategy* is based on management communication and it incorporates the top management vision, products and services, the organizational structure and corporate identity structure.
- *Management and organizational communication* are applied with the resultant corporate identity consisting of the mix of behavior of employees and management, symbolism and communication plan.
- *Marketing, management and interpersonal communications* are used to translate the reality of the identity into corporate images held by various stakeholder groups.
- *The corporate images* are eventually converted into a corporate reputation for the company, which, according to Stuart, leads to sound financial performance and business survival.
- *Environmental influences* are shown as impacting all parts of the model.



- *The organizational culture* is shown as a surrounding area consisting of the corporate personality, corporate strategy and corporate identity denoting that it is a context rather than a variable (Stuart 1999.)

There are a few interesting elements in Stuart's comprehensive model.

First, Stuart sees corporate images as the outcome of marketing, management and interpersonal communications, not based on active consumers constructing images from multiple sources.

Then, Stuart depicts the corporate identity - corporate image interface by a broken line as, according to her, the boundary is breaking down between image and identity. It is unclear if her statement can be understood as emphasizing that identities and images are co-constructed in relation to each other, or even more strongly, that identity and image are overlapping concepts depicting the same phenomenon. Traditionally, the interplay could refer to increasing openness and transparency in company actions. However, based on the organization-focused view in which images mirror identity, it is difficult to say what is referred to here. Despite the dotted line, the model as such represents a static view on images as it does not have a time line nor consider change, although the feedback loop can be argued to depict a process view of corporate identity.

Thirdly, environmental forces are not regarded to have an impact on the company's reputation. Hence, reputation is depicted as something static over time, or even more dramatically, reputation that is not sensitive to historical contexts. Consequently, it is not related to the times of its emergence nor can it be interpreted differently in other historical contexts.

However, despite the reflections put forth here, Stuart's model gives an overview of corporate identity management, also called branding, and depicts elements frequently reflected upon in comprehensive traditional organization-focused corporate image models and literature for managing the corporate image. Although the vocabulary used within the branding literature differs, the basic thinking is in general similar to Stuart's conceptual model. However, the temporal dimension is conceptualized in Stuart's model by the corporate reputation, a concept that is briefly touched upon next.

#### *2.4.2.2. Reputation vs. reputation management*

Within the domain of corporate image research, corporate reputation has been examined from the economic, strategic, marketing, organizational behavior, sociology and accountancy perspective (Fombrun & van Riel 2003). Reputation captures temporality in images and is regarded to be a socially constructed general opinion. However, this concept has also been defined in various ways (for overviews, see e.g. Gotsi & Wilson 2001; Barnett, Jermier et al. 2006) and, for example, within management studies it is sometimes used as interchangeable to image (see e.g., Schultz 2002).

In the latest overview and analysis on how the reputation concept has been defined by various authors, Barnett, Jermier et al. (2006) provided a conclusive definition of corporate reputation as "observers' collective judgments of a corporation based on

assessments of the financial, social, and environmental impacts attributed to the corporation over time” (Barnett, Jermier et al. 2006, 34). Thus, corporate reputation is formed over time by repeated impressions of the corporate image (Markwick & Fill 1997; Gray & Balmer 1998) pointing at an aggregated image of the company, a sum up total.

However, Fombrun and Rindova (Fombrun & van Riel 1998) have included an evaluative dimension in the definition and define reputation as “a collective representation of a firm’s past actions that describe the firm’s ability to deliver value outcomes to multiple stakeholders” (230). Dowling (2002) suggests that the evaluation is based on characteristics “such as authenticity, honesty, responsibility and integrity evoked from the person’s corporate image” (19). Additionally, Fombrun and Rindova clearly address the concept to be constructed based on company actions. Markkanen (1999) specifies that “reputation is clearly dependent on action. You gain a reputation by doing something!” (27).

It has also been argued that reputation is more durable than image and that an image can be altered quite quickly, but the reputation requires image consistency over time (Markwick & Fill 1997).

To summarize, corporate reputation is a concept that refers to a general collective representation held by a group of people, and based on company action/s over time. Therefore, it captures temporality but on a collective level, which is out of scope for the present study. Moreover, it is assumed that reputation is gained based on company actions, whereas the image concept does not include that restriction. Reputation, when defined as discussed here, is therefore outside the focus for the present study. However, due to the conceptual confusion within corporate image research, studies that focus on image, although called reputation, are included.

#### *2.4.2.3. Corporate branding*

Although brands and images have been the focus among numerous researchers and scholars since the 1950’s, a new wave of thinking within the field has emerged during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This new wave, called ‘the second wave of corporate branding’ by Schultz, Antorini and Csaba (2005), has emerged due to recognized shortfalls in the traditional branding approach, for example, when applying product branding at corporate level, or, when failing to see the multidisciplinary in corporate branding (for a discussion, see Schultz, Antorini et al. 2005). These shortfalls do not concern, however, the corporate image and corporate identity management literature. Within these literatures the multidisciplinary nature has for long been recognized, as well as the role of the organization’s identity as one of the basic issues in an image strategy. For example, Stuart (1999), based on her analysis of the most influential corporate identity models during the last three decades, emphasizes that the main contribution of Kennedy’s seminal model (her model dates from 1987) was her awareness of “the necessity for company policy to be based on the reality of the organization for effective company image formation” (in Stuart 1999, 201) and that the most important conduit of corporate image is the company’s employers (Balmer & Greyser 2003). The critique for a lack of multidisciplinary approaches within branding invites the cross-reading of

literature on management and marketing. Furthermore, corporate level image and identity questions are more complex than they are within product level branding.

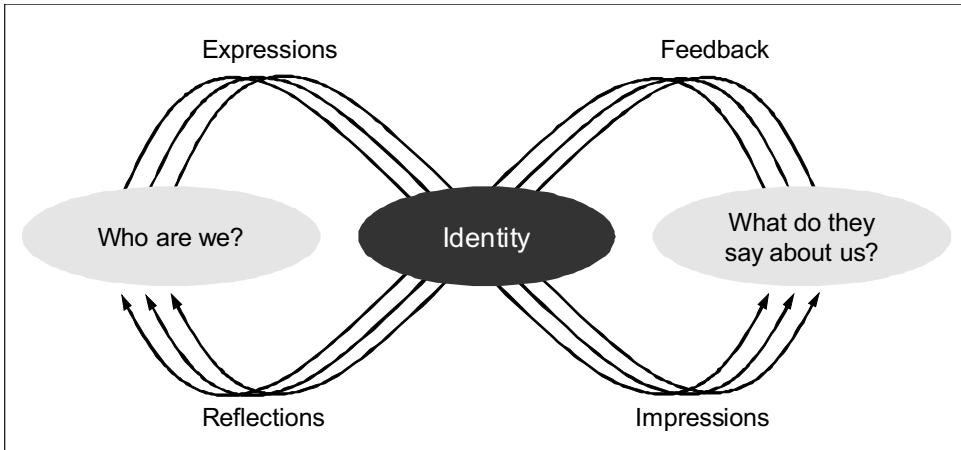
By referring to a number of scholars, Schultz (2006) summarizes that “a corporate brand originates from distinct combinations of symbols, values, and beliefs that are salient to both the organization and its dynamic relationships with internal and external stakeholders” (Schultz 2006, 24), thus indicating that the new wave within corporate branding should be conceptualized through dynamic relational models. Additionally, new understanding of consumers as active constructors of meanings pinpoints that corporate images not only mirror company actions but also other social and cultural influences<sup>24</sup>. When consumers are seen as active image constructors, images and identities become dynamic and develop constantly in relation to consumer experiences, and an image-based relationship between the entity and consumer emerges and develops. As pointed out earlier, every contact between the company and the consumer can become important from the corporate image perspective (Grönroos 2000). Following Grönroos’ line of thought, Schultz, Antorini and Csaba (2005) propose that corporate branding should be understood as a dynamic evolving concept aiming at establishing long-term relationships with multiple internal and external stakeholders, making branding both strategic, multidisciplinary integrated and longitudinal (10-16). The direction for the second wave of corporate branding, postulated by the authors, positions corporate branding as “a *process* through which an organization can continually work out its *purpose* – a purpose that is meaningful to *people* inside and outside the organization” (Schultz, Antorini et al. 2005, 16).

Therefore, during the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an emphasis on understanding branding as a dynamic process and concept has emerged, although dynamic models incorporating both identity and image, and founded on dynamic and relational thinking, are rare within the field. Hatch and Schultz (2002) have, however, presented a general process-based relational model for branding in which the interplay between identity and image is depicted. Based on their argumentation, identity is constructed and re-constructed as a dynamic interplay between identity and image in relation to what others perceive the organization to be. The organization’s identity is in Hatch and Schultz’s (2002) model based on thinking proposed by Mead, where ‘I’ represents the identity of an organization – ‘what the organization is,’ and ‘me’ represents ‘how I feel others perceive me.’ Compared with Higgins’ model of the self (1987, in Urde 1999) presented earlier, Hatch and Schultz have only considered ‘the true self,’ not the ideal or normative self presented by Higgins nor past self, as was added to Higgins’ model in section 2.3.2.1. From a marketing perspective, the ideal self, ‘how I would like to be,’ or ‘how I believe others would like me to be’ and the past self, and normative self are all of crucial importance. Moreover, as Hatch and Schultz consider the organization’s identity to be dynamic, it should be developed with a temporal dimension, especially as they base their analysis on the notion that an organization’s identity may change over time. As Markwick and

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<sup>24</sup> Kennedy depicted in her model from 1977 that the consumer’s image is not only influenced by direct, but also by indirect experiences of the company. Additionally, the image may be influenced by extraneous sources. However, Stuart’s model is static and not relational. In Stuart, H. (1999). "Towards a Definite Model of the Corporate Identity Management Process." Corporate Communications: An International Journal 4(4): 200-207.

Fill (1997) emphasize, it is the strategy content, not the process that changes in many organizations relatively frequently.



**Figure 12 Interplay between identity and image (modified from Hatch and Schultz 2002)**

By suggesting that identity is constructed as a dynamic process in the interplay between image and identity, Hatch and Schultz (2002) recognize that identity is not necessarily core, distinctive and enduring, as Albert and Whetten (2004/1985, 116) have suggested. A cornerstone in organizational identity thinking is that both identity and image are mental representations, as suggested by Brown, Dacin et al (2006) based on their literature review on definitions, and that also image is dynamic and may change. However, Hatch and Rubin (2006) have in a recent article focused on the temporal dimension of branding and conclude that brands have histories and that a brand's meaning changes over time, giving brands a historical dimension. Their article is discussed in chapter 4.3.

In conclusion, in the new wave of branding, images and identities are seen as inherently dynamic relational processes. As the view is at its infancy, not many approaches for developing branding based on a view on the interplay between image and identity, as dynamic relational processes evolving over time, are to be found.

## **2.5. Summary and conclusions**

The purpose of this chapter was to present how corporate image research has been studied and conceptualized within the field of corporate image studies in general and from the perspective of the research problems for the study. In this chapter an emphasis was put on clarifying the difference between organization-focused managerially-oriented views and consumer-focused state- and process-oriented views. Moreover, based on the findings in the empirical study, the focus in the literature was on the new wave of branding, images and identities in which the interplay between identity and

image is seen as inherently relational dynamic processes. However, not many models to illustrate the dynamic and relational interplay between identity and image have been presented with the exception of the Hatch and Schultz (2002) model. Therefore, it represents a starting point for developing a dynamic relational model for branding. The model does not, however, take into account the time dimension and all aspects of identity based on Higgins' model (1987, in Urde 1999) and can thus be developed further. As an emphasis on consumer and market orientation is underlined broadly within marketing, it is suggested as shown in Cornelissen's model in Figure 6 above, that image would precede or be equal to identity, as the conventional order is inherited from the transactional era in marketing.

However, within the Nordic School of Marketing Thought,<sup>25</sup> focusing basically on service and relationship marketing, Grönroos (2007) has summarized some general aspects of the research tradition. These aspects will be discussed here based on Grönroos' (2007) elaboration, as it seems as many of the thoughts put forth in the second wave of branding have been issues and foci for research within the Nordic School already for some time. The following conclusions are offered as openings for bridging branding with the understanding developed within the Nordic School. Therefore, some of the aspects that resonate are discussed here. Additionally, it has to be emphasized that due to the new service logic approach (see Vargo & Lusch 2004; Edvardsson, Gustafsson et al. 2005; Grönroos 2005; 2007), all companies can be considered service companies, which enhances the relevance to look into the service and relationship marketing literature for the development that has taken place during the last three decades.

First, within the Nordic School tradition, "interactions and relationships, rather than exchange are considered the focus in marketing and marketing research" (Grönroos 2007, 6). As Grönroos (2007) concludes, traditionally over time exchange and facilitating exchange has been considered the true aim of marketing (199). However, this focus draws attention from what is essential today, to interact with consumers during and in relation to the use of products and services (Grönroos 2007). Therefore, a relational view rather than transactional view is emphasized. Within branding, the new relational view resonates with Grönroos' thinking rather than the traditional sender–receiver dichotomy so often displayed in branding literature. As an illustration of the traditional view, Keller (2008) outlines in his most recent textbook that "strategic brand management involves the design and implementation of marketing programs and activities to build, measure, and manage brand equity" (38), and that "the strategic brand management process starts with a clear understanding of what the brand is to represent and how it should be positioned with respect to competitors"(38). In neither of the citations is an understanding of the consumer present, neither is branding seen as relational. Keller (2008) continues by defining that brand positioning is "the act of designing the company's offer and image so that it occupies a distinct and valued place in the target customer's mind" (38). Thus Keller suggests that the company designs the

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<sup>2525</sup> The research tradition was established in the 1980's under the name The Nordic School of Service Marketing. For a discussion on the development towards the Nordic School of marketing thought, see the introduction in Grönroos, C. (2007). *In Search of a New Logic for Marketing. Foundations of Contemporary Theory*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

image, not the consumer. The consumer is not an active but a passive receiver of messages. Grönroos (2007) points out that value for consumers is considered to emerge in consumer activities, a view that has been labeled as *value-in-use*. Value is not considered to emerge based on the organization's designing and planning processes, thus the view is in stark contrast with Keller's view mentioned above.

Based on the thinking within a value-in-use approach, if applied to branding, the conclusion drawn here is that consumers construct images in consumption. Consumption is here equated with experiences due to the image approach, as it is supposed that when expressing their experiences of a certain company, consumers depict how they have experienced the company 'in consumption.'

Second, a process view is emphasized as services are activities and processes. Branding has for long been seen as an *activity* from the company's perspective but the consumer has been regarded as a *passive* message receiver, as aforementioned illustration depicts. As discussed earlier, the new postmodern consumer culture theory emphasizes, supported by a number of researchers, that the consumer should be seen as an active image constructor. Moreover, emphasis on a dialogical approach has been on the agenda within marketing communication for a long time. For example, Fill (2006) defines marketing communications as "partly an attempt by an organization/brand to create and sustain a dialogue with its various constituencies" (36) and that "communications itself is a process by which individuals share meaning" (36). Seen from a constructivist perspective, when one communicates one builds representations of the one who speaks, of the listener, and also about the specific relationship between the two (Kapferer 2005). Fill (2006) emphasizes that for a *dialogue* to occur, each participant needs to be able to interpret the meaning embedded in others messages and to be able to respond. Within the Nordic School of Marketing Thought, it is emphasized that consumers participate as co-producers in the service process and influence the process and its outcomes as well as those who participate in the process. This view is in line with the constructivist approach on communication mentioned above.

In conclusion and in sum, the purpose of the chapter can be crystallized into three messages put forth.

First, over the years the development within the organization-focused corporate image research tradition has developed under four more or less synonymous concepts, namely image management, identity management, brand management and reputation management. Only traces of consensus have been reached on the definitions of the concepts<sup>26</sup>. For the time being, brand and branding is held in favor especially among

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<sup>26</sup> Quite many identity and image researchers express their frustration whenever the problem of defining the terms used within the field is confronted (e.g., Balmer 2001; Schultz et al, 2000). The literature within the domain not only makes reference to the triumvirate of concepts underpinning identity (corporate identity, organizational identification and visual identity), but also embraces a wealth of other concepts comprising the corporate brand, corporate communication/total corporate communications, corporate image, corporate personality and corporate reputation. The terminology within the field can be defined from many disciplinary perspectives but also the terms themselves have a multidisciplinary nature (Balmer, 2001). However, as several writers have remarked, there is a lack of consensus as to the precise meaning of many of the concepts articulated above, and the relationship between them (Balmer, 2001,) although there have been approaches to simplify the terminology into a common language as also a lot of conceptual confusion has occurred. Nevertheless, the multidisciplinary foundation is also appreciated (Balmer 2001; Schultz et al. 2000).

practitioners, but image, identity and reputation occur frequently in academic contexts. In this study, image has been favored due to the author's roots dating back to the 1980's and the image management concept. Consciously or unconsciously the comparisons between the concepts are made from this background.

Second, brand was originally a product level concept and the development towards a corporate level concept in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been called the first and second wave of branding by Schultz, Antorini and Csaba (2005). They emphasize that branding on a corporate level is much more complex than on product level, thus product level views are insufficient on the corporate level.

However, the present study contributes to the overall organization-focused and managerially-oriented view within image research by introducing a temporal dimension, namely image heritage therein. As the concept is a consumer concept depicting the presence of past times in the current image construction process, it is valid on both product and organizational as well as other levels of image research, although yet unexplored.

The study supports earlier organization-focused conceptualizations emphasizing relational and dynamic views on the image-identity interplay and extends these views with a time dimension, arguing that this development takes the organizational-focused views into the future of branding.

Based on a conceptual analysis, organizational identity is extended with a temporal dimension based on Higgins (1987) model of the self, however, noting that also past understanding of the self is important.

Third, the main contribution of the postmodern brand meaning and relationship research stream has been an understanding that organizations do not control consumer constructed corporate images to the extent that previously has been supposed. On the contrary, consumers construct images and use them in various contexts. Therefore, new understanding and conceptual models depicting the relational, dynamic and temporal aspects of the image-identity-image interplay as a process are needed, as the relational aspect indicates that the image and identity are constructed over time. As Firat, Dholakia et al. (1995) state "image creation and mythologization processes are not linear, causal, instrumental, and unidisciplinary" (53) indicating that image constructions are complex processes. Hatch and Schultz's (2002) model has here been harnessed as a starting point to be developed.

The overall understanding the literature review and empirical study provided is that corporate images are constructed by consumers based on earlier images from multiple sources in social processes over time. The image construction is also dependent on the cultural contexts wherein it takes place. Therefore, the future of branding is based on relational and dynamic views of identities and images as evolving over time through social processes in cultural contexts, within which image heritage is at the core of the consumers' image construction processes.

In the next chapter the empirical research approach for the conducted study will be presented as well as the method used in the data analysis.



### **3 GROUNDED THEORY FOR STUDYING IMAGE CONSTRUCTIONS**

In this chapter, the focus will be on the research method and on the empirical research process in the present study. The chapter is structured as follows: first, a general overview on the method, and on how it has developed, is presented. Next, the process of gathering and analyzing data with a grounded theory approach, along with the empirical choices and settings in the present study, are presented. The chapter ends with a discussion on the reliability and validity of this study.

#### **3.1. Evolutionary developments in grounded theory**

As mentioned in chapter one (1), Glaser and Strauss developed grounded theory in the 1960's. The method was developed for both collecting and analyzing data for theory generation and is especially suitable in subjectivist research approaches. The method differs from other research methods in some specific ways (Glaser & Strauss 1967, 161-184).

First, grounded theory is developed for generating new theories in fields where no previous ready theory existed; in other words, it is a method to study the unstudied. Accordingly, the researcher does not test other people's theories but creates a theory of his own. It is created gradually through an open interaction with the data, and acts as a foundation for the categorization of the data.

Second, theory generated with a grounded theory approach explains, what is going on in the data, so verification of the theory is unnecessary. Examining the reliability of the results needs, thereby, other means than traditional testing of hypotheses.

Third, data itself may be quantitative or qualitative, or a combination of both. Glaser and Strauss encouraged researchers to broaden their view on what can be considered data. Accordingly, data in a grounded theory research can consist of interviews, observations, various documents, videotapes, newspapers, letters, books, or anything that might explain the studied subject matter.

Fourth, grounded theory requires flexibility from the researcher, since the structure of the study cannot be precisely defined in the beginning of the process, but is created during the process by theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss 1967, 161-184).

To reiterate, in grounded theory the researcher does not test other people's theories but creates the theory of his own. It is created gradually through open interaction with the data, and it acts as a foundation for the classification or the categorization of the data. Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research. During the analyzing process the researcher 'socializes' with other researchers' theories while developing his own theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

Since its initial development, grounded theory has diversified and new adaptations have emerged (Heath & Cowley 2004). The most important variation of the method developed between Glaser and Strauss, the original founders of the method, was due to an internal methodological schism. The schism has become widely recognized and started when Strauss (1987), twenty years after the introduction of the method, published a detailed description of his view of the grounded theory research process, which Glaser has opposed because it forces data into categories instead of relying on the emergence of these categories from data (Glaser 1992). As a result, there are two main 'streams' of grounded theory, namely the 'glaserian' and the 'straussian' stream of research approaches.

The main differences between the two views on grounded theory have been exposed by Hartman (2001, 42 - 44). First, Strauss (together with his co-writer Corbin 1990) want to find relations between the categories already in the open coding phase, while Glaser emphasizes that the relations between the categories should be found in the last theoretical phase. Second, Glaser emphasizes that the core category should be worked out already after the first open coding phase in the process, whereas Strauss and Corbin suggest to look for the core category in a later stage. Glaser also strongly opposes Strauss and Corbin's emphasis on verification of the emerging theory. According to Glaser, the theory should emerge from the data and thus cannot be verified within the same research approach, it can only be verified later by other researchers and new research. Glaser emphasizes that grounded theory meets the needs if one wants to understand what is going on in the field and to develop a theory grounded in reality (Glaser, 1992). In a nutshell, Glaser stayed more orthodox to the original ideas of the method, whereas Strauss developed the method in directions Glaser regarded to be a completely new method (for an overview, see Hartman 2001).

The present study follows the 'glaserian' view of grounded theory, as the aim for the study is to be as explorative, inductive and to open as new an understanding of image constructions as possible, although Glaser has emphasized that everyone does one's own grounded theory, mainly due to the nature of the research problem and data..

To summarize, "grounded theory is both a method for developing categories that summarize central features of the data, and also an analysis that presents, at the end of the research a theory. The theory is in essence the explanatory framework provided by the categories that have *emerged* from the data" [emphasis in original text] (Coolican 2004, 228). The kind of theory that can be generated with grounded theory is a 'middle-range' theory. A middle-range theory does not give 'grand' explanations of society as a whole nor does it only explain relations between a few properties. Hence, the objective of a grounded theory approach is not to discover *the* theory but *a* theory that aids understanding and action in the area under investigation (Heath & Cowley 2004) as it describes a domain, which consists of phenomena common to a group of people, or in some cases, to all people (Hartman 2001). Hence, the method is well-suited to the present study as it aims at *deepening* the understanding of consumer's corporate image constructions, not to generate a grand theory of the human mind.

Grounded theory is currently well established within sociological research and has since the 1960's expanded to other fields of research (for an overview, see e.g., Hartman 2001). Within marketing, grounded theory as a 'full version' has seldom been applied;

rather it has been employed as an ‘inspirational basis’ by the researcher. According to Coolican (2004), the full version of the approach requires that the researcher move from category analysis back to data gathering (theoretical sampling) as part of the overall research process. Also, the research problem can be reformed if the emergent theory that is based on the analysis and/or theoretical sampling requires it (Coolican 2004). In the present study, a full version of grounded theory is employed in line with the ‘glaserian’ view. Next, the research process according to the ‘glaserian’ view in grounded theory is discussed.

### 3.2. The research process in grounded theory

Data collection and analysis with a grounded theory approach follows inductive logic with deductive phases, called the ‘inductive-deductive mix’ by Glaser (1978, 12). The inductive-deductive research process can be divided into three phases: (1) the open phase, (2) the selective phase, and (3) the theoretical phase. Another principle in grounded theory is constant comparison. Data is compared to each other on the category and property level constantly.

In the first inductive open phase, the aim is to find an emerging core category. For obtaining the maximum openness of the data and the emerging theory - theoretical sensitivity - “the researcher should enter the research setting with as few predetermined ideas as possible – especially logically deducted, a prior hypothesis” (Glaser 1978, 3) The open phase ends when a core category has been found.

In the first **open phase** the data is carefully read through, paying attention the easy-to-understand everyday life categories or otherwise intelligible categories of which the text consists. Already at this stage, the aim is to form a rough definition of the studied phenomenon. “This is the data gathering process, in which the researcher gathers, codes, and analyses the data over and over again, and at the same time considering what kind of data should be gathered next” (Glaser & Strauss 1967, 47 – 50).

Generating theory emphasizes emergent conceptualizations. As Glaser points out, emergent categories usually prove to be the most relevant and the best fitted to the data. As they are emerging, their fullest possible generality and meanings are continually being developed and checked for relevance. Emergence of categories solves the problems of fit, relevance, forcing and richness (Glaser 1978, 38).

The second deductive phase in the research process is a **selective phase** called theoretical sampling, in which data collection is based on a hypothesis generated by the analysis of the collected data. Grounded theory requires flexibility from the researcher, since the structure of the study cannot be precisely defined in the beginning of the process, but is created during the process by theoretical sampling (Glaser 1967, 161-184). Theoretical sampling is directed by the core category and involves purposeful sampling for gathering more data for understanding the core category and data is collected when it is needed. As Glaser and Strauss (1967, 6) emphasize, “generating a theory from data means that most hypothesis and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research.”

*“Generating a theory involves a process of research. By contrast, the source of certain ideas, or even ‘models,’ can come from sources other than the data [emphasis in original text]”* (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 6). In the present study, the temporal dimension emerged as a category, and was deliberately chosen as the core category to be focused on in ensuing data collections and analysis, as it was known by the researcher that the temporal dimension in the image construction on an individual level represented a view of image constructions that had little been studied within corporate image research before. To my knowledge, no studies exists that focus on conceptualizing the temporal dimension of individual consumers’ image constructions within corporate image research although the temporal dimension is both implicitly and explicitly frequently referred to.

The third, **theoretical phase** is a phase where the researcher socializes with other researchers by comparing his own findings with other researchers’ findings. In multidisciplinary approaches, findings are compared with findings from other disciplines. In the present study, findings are compared to some studies within corporate image research, and especially to knowledge on memory within neuroscience.

As a summary, a constructivist grounded theory seeks to interpret and understand how subjects construct their realities, not to predict them (Charmaz 2000). Concerning the method, the research process following a grounded theory approach can be depicted as a process in which the researcher’s understanding of the method develops by doing it (Heath & Cowley 2004) and that everyone develops one’s own grounded theory.

Next, the research process and how it follows a grounded theory approach is reviewed.

### **3.3. The research process in the conducted study**

In this part of the chapter the research process of the conducted study is reviewed. The research process is guided by the overall research problem and aim for the study specified as “to deepen the understanding of how consumers construct corporate images?” The research question posed to the informants, the data collection in the explorative and selective phase of the research and the research process in the conducted study is reviewed.

#### **3.3.1. The research question**

In the whole study, one overall research question was posed to all informants: “What comes to mind when you hear ‘Anttila’? The aim with this open-ended question was to allow the informant to freely evaluate and elaborate on the company from his/her own perspective. Before the study, it was assumed that individuals know how they think about the company, but during the study it became evident that the informants also needed to elaborate on how they think of the company in order to reach some degree of subjective understanding of how they perceive the company. Hence, the open-ended question functioned as an “eye-opener” both for the informant and the researcher concerning the focal company’s image and image construction process. In addition, earlier open-ended questions have been considered to be suitable in capturing the

complexity of consumers' store images (Stern, Zinkhan et al. 2001), especially when involving minimal interviewer influence, which is usual in qualitative research approaches, taking their leads from the informants who inform and guide the research (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Hence, as Silverman expresses it "the primary issue was to generate data which gives an authentic insight into people's experiences" (1995, 91).

In the present study, an emphasis was put on creating an open and relaxed atmosphere during all data gathering events with the aim to encourage the informants to elaborate freely on the case company. It was specifically pointed out to each and every informant that there are no "right or wrong answers" in this study, but their own individual way of constructing images is considered the right way and what comes to mind is 'right.' for the purposes of this study. This clarification was considered a necessity, due to the emic point of view in order to understand the informant's image construction process (see for example Schwandt 1994), and due to my own experiences when teaching corporate branding courses. During the courses, I have frequently experienced that students express or even apologize that they might have a wrong image about the focal company, or that they might have misunderstood, or do not understand the company's messages, or they apologize for not having followed the focal company's messages. Miles and Huberman (1994, 11) also emphasize not to give the impression to the informant that the researcher is in search for 'right answers' as it may lead the informant into 'impression management,' which threatens the validity in an emic research approach.

### ***3.3.2. Data collection***

This section discusses what kind of data has been gathered for analyzing consumers' corporate image constructions and how it has been gathered. As was pointed out earlier, Glaser and Strauss (1967) encourage researchers to broaden their view on what can be considered data, as data in a grounded theory approach can consist of anything that might explain the subject matter. Accordingly, a multiple-method approach evolved. Based on theoretical sampling, data was gathered by in-depth, one-on-one, unstructured, open-ended conversational interviews, written accounts, one videotaped group interview and learning diaries informants voluntarily submitted. All interviews and the videotaped group interview were transcribed into texts. Hence, all the analyzed data consisted of texts, although non-verbal communication also influenced the understanding that emerged.

The study encompasses five separate parts as data gathering was based on findings from earlier stages of the research process (theoretical sampling). In line with a grounded theory approach, the structure of the study emerged while conducting it. Emerging research designs are, according to Hudson and Ozanne (1988), better in taking into account the understanding the researcher develops during the research process. Based on the findings that emerged during the research process, a multiple-method approach emerged.

The data collection is based on five studies:

*Explorative part:*

Study 1 Six (6) in-depth, one-on-one, unstructured, open-ended conversational interviews, where the informants talked about the image they had of the focal company,

*Theoretical sampling:*

Study 2 11 graduate students' written accounts of their impressions of the focal company,

Study 3 A videotaped group interview with five (5) students from the aforementioned group of students, and

Study 4 Seven (7) individual learning diaries from students in the aforementioned group of students in study 2.

Study 5 Six (6) new in-depth, one-on-one, unstructured, open-ended conversational interviews, where the informants talked about the image they had of the focal company.

Thus 23 informants took part in the study and 35 accounts were analyzed as data. Figure 13 below summarizes the methods used for data collection, the amount of informants in each study and the total amount of accounts that was analyzed during the research process.

### Data collection

		Age			
Year		21-31 years	42-59 years	Over 60 years	
Explorative ↓	2003 Study 1	2 interviews	2 interviews	2 interviews	Total of 35 accounts
	2003 Study 2	11 written accounts			
Theoretical sampling ↓	2003 Study 3	Group interview with 5 participants			
	2003 Study 4	7 learning diaries			
	2005 Study 5	1 interview	5 interviews		
Total		14 informants	7 informants	2 informants	23 informants

Figure 13 Data collection in the present study

In the present study, individuals taking part in the study are called informants. In total, 22 informants took part in the study and 35 written accounts were collected and analyzed. Twelve (12) of the informants were interviewed and eleven (11) wrote accounts. Moreover, seven (7) learning diaries were collected and used as data and one (1) videotaped group interview with five (5) participants was analyzed. If classified based on the informants' age, fourteen (14) of the informants were between 21 and 31 years, seven (7) were between 42 and 49 years old, and two (2) were over 60 years old.

The data collection took place in the Helsinki region, the region where the focal company Anttila started its business, and it was assumed that the informants would be familiar with the company. Although the data was collected in the Helsinki region, it turned out that not all informants were from the region but from all over the country, which enriched the findings. All informants were, however, familiar with the company.

All parts of the study will be discussed separately in the following.

### *3.3.2.1. First study*

The first part of the study was exploratory in nature with a convenience sample of six adults, but with. The data was collected and analyzed in 2003, and consisted of in-depth, one-on-one, unstructured, open-ended conversational interviews for developing an understanding of how the informants constructed their image of the focal company. The requirement that the focal company should be known to the informants was fulfilled and the in-depth conversational one-to-one interviews took place in natural settings. The initial open-ended question posed to every informant was "What comes to mind when you hear 'Anttila'?" Follow-up questions were made mainly based on the informant's own words. The interviews lasted from one half to 3 hours and some of the informants elaborated further on the research question in later discussions during the evening or at other occasions. This data was added to the data set as memos.

The adults were chosen from three age categories: first, under 30 years old (young adults), 31 to 59 years old (middle-aged adults) and over 60 years old (old adults), with two informants from each age group, in order to allow comparison between emerging findings if necessary. A constructivist approach necessitates an 'intimate familiarity' with the respondents for gaining depth and understanding in the analysis (Blumer 1969 in Charmaz 2000).

Each **informant is presented** in order to show the relationship between him/her and the interviewer. The better both knew each other, the more conversational in nature the interview became; thus the interviews took more time and more perspectives were brought up in the discussion. The natural setting of the interviews is also described as interviewees respond in relation to the where the interview is taking place, as well as to the interviewer (Alasuutari 1995). The informants were not informed in advance about the purpose of the study or about the case company, but it was revealed as the interview started.

Sanna is a 21 year old female, Laura is a 26 year old female, both are students at the Helsinki Business Polytechnic, Helia. The students were chosen randomly among

students in the school's lobby and they were unknown to the interviewer. Their attitude was neutral.

Vepa is a 49 year old male lawyer, highly interested in finding the most cost-efficient choice of any product (i.e., price-oriented) and a frequent customer at many low-price markets. Shopping is one of his hobbies, but also a duty, since he is the father of two teenagers. His attitude toward being interviewed was very positive and the interview took place in a relaxed atmosphere at his home in their living room.

Mikko is a 48 year old male M.Sc. (Econ). The interview took place at the interviewer's home. Mikko takes care of most of the purchases in his family. The atmosphere was relaxed and he was highly interested in the research.

Jorma is 76, and Eine 65 years old. They are a married couple, and they were interviewed outside their home, while they were doing gardening. Jorma was happy to participate, but his wife Eine was not that eager. Eine's reason was obvious: her daughter works for Anttila and she didn't want to criticize the company. Thus, two of the respondents could be classified as internal or semi-internal stakeholders in the company.

In sum, despite the attempt in the study to choose consumers who recognized the case company it turned out that the informants represented various stakeholder groups ranging from frequent customers and parents of an employee, to occasional customers as every informant mentioned spontaneously having bought something from the company. This did not however, change the focus on consumers in the study, rather the findings opens up avenues for future research focusing on stakeholder groups.

**Conclusions** drawn from the explorative study were that the most salient “core of the emerging theory”(Glaser & Strauss 1967) in the data was the temporal dimension in the informants' image constructions, which specified the research problem further to *‘understand the temporal dimension in image constructions.’*

Hence, the temporal dimension in image constructions became the core category and central theoretical framework to understand, define, and describe, as well as the basis for theoretical sampling, wherein the data collection is controlled by the emerging theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

Due to the chosen core category, the findings indicated that the youngest informants' awareness of the company was short in terms of time span. In other words, the young informants did not refer many years back in time in the interviews. For reaching an understanding of the role age plays in image constructions, additional data was gathered among young adult informants in the age group of 20-30 years old. Hence, theoretical sampling and a selective approach, in line with a grounded theory approach, was followed in the study from here on in the research process. Next, the data gathering in the second study is presented.



### 3.3.2.2. *Second study*

Based on the analysis from the explorative study, age was indicated to be of importance in understanding the temporal dimension in image constructions. Hence, data in the second study was collected on a voluntary basis among eleven graduate students, aged 23 – 31, who participated in a corporate branding course given by the author. In the initial stage of the course, before it started, the informants were asked to write accounts on “What comes to mind when you hear ‘Anttila’”? It was pointed out that there were no expectations of what they should write about, no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers, and there was no time limit for the writing. After 45 minutes everyone was ready. The students were asked to e-mail their accounts to the interviewer.

The findings indicated that age is not the only factor influencing the awareness time span of company related experiences from multiple sources as some students referred to transmitted or “inherited” knowledge from family members and other sources, which extended their awareness of the company’s history until times much before their birth. This finding revealed not only the importance of other sources than the company or ones own experiences as a source for image constructions, but also that these ‘other sources’ also have a time dimension in their experiences, which can, through the knowledge they share with others, extend the awareness time span for the informant until early years in the company’s history. Therefore, inherited or transmitted knowledge remarkably extended the awareness time span. Moreover, some students referred to childhood memories and influences from their childhood, much before they would be classified as ‘consumers’, but rather as children.

In order to test and get feedback from the conclusions drawn from the second study, a videotaped group interview (third study) with 5 volunteering students who had taken part in the second study was conducted. As Miles and Huberman emphasize “the more emic the study, the more useful early feed-back is likely to be” (1994, 276).

### 3.3.2.3. *Third study*

Based on the analysis of the collected accounts in the second study, it was decided to collect further data through a videotaped group interview with 5 students who had participated in the second study. The purpose of this cooperative inquiry (Edwards, Davies et al. 2005) was to understand how the informants themselves interpret the data in the accounts and also to inspire the informants to reflect more on their own and others’ thinking about the case company. The study also served as a way to get feedback on the conclusions drawn from the second study from the informants themselves (Miles & Huberman 1994). Accordingly, in the videotaped group interview, five students from the second study analyzed and discussed the collected accounts from the previous study (second study). In the beginning of the group interview everyone read through all the written anonymous accounts from the second study. This was done in order to stimulate and to get the informants involved in the group interview. The use of participants as co-analysts was motivated by the subjectivist approach in the research and it elevated the validity of the conclusions drawn from the data. It also ‘accumulated the data collection’ through the interpretations and discussions the participant had on their own writings. The group interview was transcribed and analyzed.

Students taking part in the corporate branding course were given an assignment to write a learning diary during the course and reflect upon the issues discussed during the course. Some students also voluntarily discussed the conducted study and the case company. Hence, these learning diaries were considered as data (fourth study) in this study, which is in line with the grounded theory approach, in which various kinds of data can be included in the study (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

#### *3.3.2.4. Fourth study*

The fourth data set consisted of seven learning diaries from students in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> study. In these 7 learning diaries the students voluntarily commented on either the research design or the case company. Learning diaries were collected two months after the students had written the accounts and participated in the group interview (study 2 and 3).

Based on the collected data, two conclusions were drawn: first, age was not an indicator on the temporal dimension, and second, the interviews were found to provide the richest data on the temporal dimension. Accordingly, the fifth study was based on data from interviews among adults.

#### *3.3.2.5. Fifth study*

In the fifth study, the data set was based on a convenience sample of six new in-depth one-to-one, unstructured, open-ended conversational interviews with six adults aged 31-48 years. The data was collected and analyzed in 2005. These interviews were conducted in line with the explorative study's interviews and transcribed. The purpose was to further deepen the understanding on '*the temporal dimension in consumers' image constructions.*'

#### *Informant presentation*

Ilkka is a 43 year old male M.Sc. (Econ), who is highly interested in shopping. The interview took place in a relaxed atmosphere at the interviewer's home. The informant was interested in the research and in the company as his father knew the founder of the company.

Oskar is a 31 year old male M.Sc. (Econ), who was interviewed at the interviewer's office in a relaxed atmosphere.

Maria is a 44 year old female M.Sc. (Econ), who was interviewed in the interviewer's office in a relaxed atmosphere.

Vaula is a 47 year old female M.Pol.Sc. The interview took place in the interviewer's office in a relaxed atmosphere.

Sari is a 42 year old female M.Sc. (Econ), and the previous brand manager of an international brand. The interview took place at the interviewee's office in a relaxed atmosphere.

Kirsi is a 48 year old female economist and the interview took place at her home in a relaxed atmosphere.

In sum, the theoretical sampling was guided by the emerging theory on the temporal dimension in image constructions. After the first interviews (first study), the informants' age appeared to explain how they experienced the company over time. Hence, further data was collected among young adults (second, third, and fourth study). The informants' age did not, however, indicate the temporal dimension in their image constructions. In conclusion, additional data (fifth study) was collected among adults through a convenience sampling of six one-on-one in-depth interviews. Next, indexing the material is presented.

### 3.3.2.6. *Coding the material*

During the data collection the material was indexed based on a system depicted in the Table below.

**Table 3** Data coding system used in this study

Source of data (Abbreviation)	Logic of indexing
Interviews (I)	(Name, age, I); example: (Oskar, 31, I)
Written accounts (A)	Name (age, A)
Group interview (GI)	Name (age, GI)
Learning diaries (LD)	Name (age, LD)

The informants are referred to by their first name, the informant's age and the source of data. The data was abbreviated by the sort of data it refers to, for example, the interviews were abbreviated as "I". Accordingly, when referring to Oskar, who is 31 years old and was interviewed as an informant in the fifth study, his data contribution is coded as (Oskar, 31, I). The system is used for reference in the analysis of the data.

Due to the constant comparative method, which is central in a grounded theory approach, the index is used in references to illustrate the nature of data referred to. Some informants had multiple roles in the research as some wrote accounts, took part in the group interview and voluntarily wrote about their experiences in their learning diaries. Therefore, it was possible to follow how their thoughts about the company developed and became more diversified during the research. Next, the data analysis in the present research is discussed.

### 3.3.3. *Data analysis in the present study*

The data was analyzed in two stages. First, in order to reach a pre-understanding of image constructions, an explorative study was conducted and analyzed. In this open phase of the data analysis, the categories and properties that emerged revealed new

understanding of image constructions. New data was collected following theoretical sampling. Besides analyzing the data as it was collected, the whole data set was analyzed in the second, selective phase of the study. In the third theoretical phase, the findings were compared with other researchers' findings and literature, both within the field of image research as well as within neuroscience.

**In the first open phase of the analysis**, the transcribed individual interviews were carefully read through and coded, following a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss 1967, 47 – 50; Charmaz 2000). The data was first open coded, paying attention to which 'easy-to-understand everyday life categories' or otherwise intelligible categories the texts consisted of, aiming at producing concepts, giving names to events, phenomena, etc.

The coded data was analyzed through a constant comparative method in order to reduce the data to categories and properties. Connections between categories and properties were explored and compared with each other during the whole research process. A comparison was made between informants as well as within data from one individual incident by incident. Through this process it was possible to categorize the open coded data and arrange it into **categories and properties**. The categories were named to depict 'what is going on in the data' (Glaser and Strauss 1967). For example, when one of the informants mentioned the founder of the company, Kalle Anttila as the first thing that comes to mind of the company, it was first coded as the temporal dimension (past time), and later 'upgraded' into a category.

According to Glaser and Strauss, emergent categories usually prove to be the most relevant and best fitted to the data. As they are emerging, their fullest possible generality and meanings are continually being developed and checked for relevance. This solves the problems of fit (applicable to and indicated by the data), meaningful relevance, forcing and richness (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Already at this explorative stage, a rough definition of image constructions was formed and the core category selected.

In the second, **selective phase of the analysis**, in which data was collected based on theoretical sampling, which was further based on the chosen core category, the whole corpus of data was analyzed. New categories, properties and dimensions of properties emerged. The analysis of the data took place during and after data collection in order to take advantage of opportunities to follow up on insights from the entire corpus of data. Through constant comparison of **categories, properties and dimensions**, an understanding of the temporal dimension in image constructions was generated.

In the third, **theoretical phase**, the emergent understanding of image constructions, and especially of the temporal dimension within it (conceptualized here as image heritage), was compared with research and propositions put forth by other researchers within the corporate image research tradition as well as with research on memory in other disciplines.

Next, the chosen empirical context, the case company, is presented.

### 3.3.4. *Empirical context in the present study*

The empirical context in this study is a widely known Finnish retail store called Anttila Oy<sup>27</sup>. The company was chosen as the empirical context due to a number of reasons, which all are important.

First, the case company was chosen based on an episode in May 2003, which also clarified the need for open unstructured interviews on how people construct corporate images. The episode is narrated next:

It was Saturday and I came out to the parking place outside our house. Our neighbor had just arrived from a shopping trip and was unpacking his car. My presence obviously got him embarrassed, he took his time when unpacking his car and finally, as I didn't leave, he began to excuse himself for having shopping bags from Kodin Anttila, a shop for home decoration that had opened up some time ago nearby. He explained that he got an impulse all of a sudden to look into Kodin Anttila, although he doesn't usually shop at Anttila. It had been a real surprise for him to find out that they sold nice, good quality things and that the shop was really fresh and inviting. He was still embarrassed and tried to convince me to go to Kodin Anttila, in order to find out for myself and verify the difference.

The episode described above about my neighbor made me pay attention not only to how differently people comprehend companies, but also to the belief they seem to presume others to share their views. Due to the episode it seemed as if Anttila would provide a rich context for studying images. The findings from the exploratory study encouraged the choice of Anttila as the focal company for the whole study.

Second, Anttila is one of the biggest non-food retailers in Finland and part of the leading trading company Kesko. Anttila employs 2,600 people. In 2006, there were more than 26 million customers visiting Anttila stores with online and store sales (VAT included) totaling EUR 668 million. In Finland, with 5, 2 million inhabitants, it means that every Finn would, on average, visit Anttila five times per year. Therefore, Anttila can be considered to have a strong position in the retailing market, drawing the conclusion that probably almost every adult Finn could be chosen as an informant for the present study with the criterion that the company should be familiar to the informant. The study revealed that the company's history also provided a rich variety of image constructions rooted in multiple sources and means throughout times.

Third, Anttila is an important part of the Finnish retailing history as it celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2002. Based on the findings from the exploratory study, it emerged to be an advantage to choose a relatively old company at this exploratory stage for understanding the temporal dimension in consumers' image constructions.

Next, a brief overview of the company's history is given based on data from the company's home page on the internet.

The company Kalle Anttila Oy was founded in 1952 by Kalle Anttila and it became the first mail order company in Finland. The mail order catalogues were widely read in Finland when published. "Right from the beginning, the aim of the company has been to sell quality goods cheaper than elsewhere." Two years later, in 1954, Anttila opened the

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<sup>27</sup> Anttila's home page ([http://www.anttila.fi/in\\_brief.html](http://www.anttila.fi/in_brief.html)). Visited 22.11.2007

first budget department store in Helsinki, Finland. The owner, Kalle Anttila, was depicted in catalogues and advertisements and he became a well-known person in Finland. During the first decades, successful entrepreneurs were often reviewed in Finnish magazines. As a result, the private life of the founders also became familiar to the post-war Finland. Due to the historic era, these successful businessmen were looked upon as pioneers in building a 'new' Finland. In 1976, Kalle Anttila sold the, until then, privately owned company to the trading company Tuko. In 1996, another Finnish trading company, Kesko, took over. The department store for home decoration called Kodin Anttila ('Home Anttila') was founded in 1992. In 2003, Kodin Anttila was re-named and became Kodin Ykkönen ('Home one').

Currently Anttila's four retail concepts are:

- Anttila department stores
- Kodin Ykkönen -home style stores for interior designs and decoration
- NetAnttila on-line department store

On the company's home page, the company is described as: "Customer satisfaction is the central objective of Anttila's trading in all its business fields. Anttila's strong position in the Finnish retailing market is based on dedicated personnel, centralized purchasing, efficient logistics and retail chain marketing. Anttila is a member of the Intercontinental Group of Department Stores (IGDS)" ([www.anttila.com](http://www.anttila.com) visited at 09.02.2005).

Anttila's slogans have changed over the years, cheap prices being one of the core identity elements until the 1990's. In Table 4, the company's slogans over the years are presented.

**Table 4** Anttila's slogans

50's	"Buy cautiously, to be economical is not stinginess"
60's	"No-one can stop me from selling cheaper"
70's	"Better products at cheaper prices"
80's	"Why would you pay more for fashion"
90's	"Come always first to Anttila" and "For the clever money"
00's	"We offer a wide assortment of quality products at good prices within the relaxed self-service environment of our modern chain stores"
00's	Kodin Ykkönen's slogan is: We sell well-known brands at reasonable prices.

Source: Anttila's homepage<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> [www.anttila.fi](http://www.anttila.fi) visited 03.05.2005

Even if the slogans only partially represent the identity of the company, they represent a crystallization of the corporate identity. In Anttila's slogans a change from "cheap" to "clever money" onwards to "good prices" can be regarded as representing a change in the company's corporate identity strategy. Hence, the original identity of a cheap retail store, defined by the founder Kalle Anttila, started to change already in the 1970's.

Fourth, Anttila can be considered, throughout its history, as an active and innovative marketing communicator. Anttila was among the first companies in the Finnish market to introduce mail order shopping based on printed catalogues and later e-commerce. The company has also always been an active advertiser in printed media, especially through direct mail.

Fifth, it was decided at an early stage of the research not to involve the company into the research for background information on company actions or corporate image strategies over the years. Hence, all company-related data used is published on the company's internet home pages. This decision was made in order to make it possible to stay tuned to the informants' views of the company and to stay open to all views the informants' provided.

To summarize, as a well-known Finnish retailer, the chosen empirical context not only was known to all informants, it also inspired lyrical expressions and provided rich data; *"Oh, this endless stream of words that a genuinely Finnish company can create in a student! And what strong images I have of it!"* (Eva-Maria, 23 years old, comments in a learning diary). However, the company was relatively unknown to the researcher. I have visited the company occasionally and I was relatively unaware of the company's strategies and actions over the years, so I did not have many preconceived ideas of the company. This may be considered as strength in the research as it made it possible to stay open to the informants' views. Accordingly, the informants provided much information about the company, which was new to me.

Moreover, retailing as a context for studying consumers' corporate image constructions is here defined as a context among other possible company contexts. However, the importance of retailer brands and images has been recognized. With reference to the editorial in a special issue on retail brands and customer loyalty in the *Journal of Retailing* (2004), the retailer as a brand is one of the most important trends in retailing. The purpose of the special issue was to stimulate research on the topic and especially on understanding the image of a retailer as a brand.

Following this line of thought, consumers also represent but one group of stakeholders among other possible stakeholder groups to be studied. The chosen context and stakeholder group can be regarded as representing a 'basic' setting, providing ideas and understanding of how images can be studied, documented, analyzed, written about and developed in other settings (other companies and other stakeholder groups) and levels (e.g., personal, product, profession, branch, industry, region, country level). Hence, on a general level, opportunities for generalizing basic structures in image constructions are many, but on a specific company level, specific image construction elements identified on the focal company cannot be generalized to represent the image of the whole company, nor evaluated in regard to the focal company by others than the case company's executives. In sum, this specific study focuses on understanding consumers'

image construction processes and elements present in these processes, not the focal company's images. However, although the relevance of company specific findings is to be evaluated solely by the focal company executives, the findings may on a general level add to our understanding of how consumers construct images of a retailing store.

Next, the reliability and validity of the study is discussed.

### **3.4. Reliability and validity of the conducted study**

In this part the criteria for evaluating the reliability and validity of the study is discussed. The section starts with an evaluation of the developed theory in relation to the grounded theory approach.

In a grounded theory approach, a substantive theory aims at explaining 'what is going on' in the data in one substantive area. When advancing a one-area substantive theory to a general formal theory, the theory is not usually generated directly from the gathered data but modified with other theories through comparative methods (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The present study is a one-area study and the concept of image heritage is generated based on this one area. However, the generated concept is in its core about memory so the findings are compared with knowledge from new fields of science, i.e. neuroscience in which the mind is understood as a dynamic network system. Moreover, during the research process not only was the gathered data analyzed, but also daily life and other areas and image levels have been in focus for testing the developing theory and its possibilities for generalization. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) point out, this usually leads to the situation that the researcher herself has high confidence in its credibility, which also holds true in the present study.

When advancing a substantive theory to a formal one, comparative analysis of groups from many kinds of substantive areas is the most powerful method (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Formulation of a genuine formal theory on image heritage in a business context depicting the spectra of all possible nuances requires future research among other stakeholder groups, other business contexts, branches and so forth. However, the conducted study and the generated concept of image heritage can be developed sufficiently to take into account contingencies and qualifications in other substance areas. Hence, if image heritage is to be regarded as a one-area formal theory, in future research it should be treated as a substantive theory and generalized by comparative analyses in other substantive areas within business. Based on Glaser and Strauss's (1967, 42) discussion on substantive and formal theories, the conclusion can also be drawn that all consumer studies in a business context are to be considered substantive theories and concepts as they do not aim at describing people's behavior in general but in a business context. Nevertheless, good grounded theory can be evaluated based on four criteria (Glaser & Strauss 1967, 237-249):

First, the theory has to fit the substantive area. In other words, the categories and properties should not be forced on the data, but emerge from the data, and thus, correspond closely to the data. In the conducted study, emphasis has been put on transparency of data, the research process and analysis in order to verify for the reader that the categories and properties emerged from the data, and not pre-determined by the



researcher. Especially the exploratory study is thoroughly documented in the thesis for ensuring transparency in the analysis.

Second, the theory should be readily understandable by laymen concerned with this area. Glaser and Strauss are sociologists and have conducted studies in, for example, hospitals about dying patients. In such a context, the laymen are the doctors and nurses in the hospital. Then, who are the laymen in the present study on corporate images in a retailing context? For example, some of the informants felt that their images of the focal company are grounded in certain times in the (company's) history, here called the main focus for image heritage. Other laymen could be the top management of a company, who, de facto often make strategic decisions about target corporate images for their company. As mentioned in the introduction, Dowling (2002) pointed out that it is easier to build on consumers' existing images than to build new ones from scratch. This point of image heritage could readily be understandable by top management.

Third, the theory should be sufficiently general to be applicable to a multitude of daily situations. As an example of the image heritage usability, an example is given here from an everyday situation: The 20<sup>th</sup> of December 2005 the leading Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* and the Swedish language newspaper *Hufvudstadsbladet* both announced that the police are still looking for the impudent thief who robbed Kodin Anttila. The newspapers' source was the printed announcement of the Finnish News Agency (STT), who had got the information from a police press release. In all the printed material from all the mentioned instances, the company was called Kodin Anttila, not Kodin Ykkönen, despite having been renamed already some years ago. Hence, image heritage is applicable as those people's image of the company's name, who wrote or forwarded the announcement, was rooted in past times.

Fourth, the theory should allow the user partial control over a structure and daily process. In other words, applying the theory should provide the user with a controllable theoretical foothold through control of the interaction between two people. Understanding that image heritage is the foundation for image constructions today may provide better control, or at least better understanding, of the interaction between two people, or between a company and a consumer.

In conclusion, image heritage can be considered as a concept that meets these criteria specified by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for a good grounded theory approach. Additionally, Glaser has pointed out that good grounded theory should provide opportunities for other researchers to develop the theory through new research. Image heritage meets this requirement as well since it is open for new insights and development, as the conducted study provides a general definition and guidelines for development of the concept.

However, the quality of a study should also meet more general quality criteria than those generated for a specific research method and within qualitative research, there are two positions related to the quality of the qualitative research.

From a conventional stance, the quality of research is evaluated based on its validity and reliability. Reliability refers to the "extent to which a measurement procedure yield the same answer however and whenever it is carried out" (Kirk & Miller 1986, 19). In other

words, results will be the same if measured again. Validity refers to the truth of the findings, “the extent to which it gives the correct answer” (Kirk & Miller 1986, 19). The concepts validity and reliability are, however, derived from quantitative research often based on realist worldviews, aiming at evaluating the objectivity and neutrality of the conducted study (Daymon & Holloway 2002). Despite having roots in quantitative research, within which they have relatively standardized definitions, the concepts are frequently also used to evaluate qualitative studies. The problem within qualitative research is that these standardized procedures for evaluating validity and reliability do not match with qualitative studies. Therefore, qualitative studies should be evaluated by terms more suitable for qualitative studies (Miles & Huberman 1994).

The other position for evaluating the quality of qualitative research is based on the study’s authenticity and trustworthiness. Trustworthiness and authenticity are concepts central to the whole research process (Lincoln & Guba 2003) and evaluated based on the researcher’s documentation of the research process and the decisions made along the way (Daymon & Holloway 2002).

The aim of the present study was to understand “the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt 1994, 118). This ‘emic’ point of view focuses on understanding ‘the others’ point of view of a situation. Since the ontology in the present study is based on a relativist worldview, it is assumed that no amount of inquiry will converge on a single reality because multiple realities exist and these realities are changing. However, a qualitative study often aims at explaining or making a particular phenomenon understandable rather than aiming at a generalization of the findings. In qualitative research the object is, however, to discuss in what regard the researcher assumes or argues that the study has general validity beyond the individual case explored (Alasuutari 1995). In other words, how relevant is the given explanation for consumers’ corporate image constructions and especially the temporal dimension and are they understandable? Although the given explanation is of local character, it will be discussed in chapter five (5) on a more general level, what implications the results have for corporate image research and how far the results can be generalized among consumers in other contexts.

Following Miles and Huberman’s (1994) guidelines for evaluating how good a piece of work is, the objectivity, reliability, internal and external validity of the conducted study will be discussed next.

**The objectivity** of a study can be framed as the relative neutrality of a study. This means that the conclusions relate to the study, not to the researcher, pointing at researcher bias and interpretative problems or preconceived ideas. Qualitative research approaches enable the researcher to be involved in the field and to conceptualize reality from the point of view of those involved in it (Daymond 2002, 5). Accordingly, no preconceived expectations or ideas guided the present study. The temporal dimension in the image constructions emerged from the first exploratory study and more data was collected based on the core category that emerged from the previous phases in the study. An emphasis was put on “taking the informant by his/her words” and not to interpret it.

Objectivity also refers to the researcher’s documentation of the research process, in other words, are the study’s general methods and procedures described explicitly and in

detail? For enabling evaluation of the objectivity of the study, transparency of the research process was emphasized in the documentation by explicit and detailed description of the whole research process, both in terms of theoretical constructs (Chapter 2) and empirical procedures (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4). The conclusions drawn are explicated by displayed data and the procedure is made explicit, especially in the explorative open phase of the study. Hence, due to transparency, the research process should be comprehensible for other researchers, as also the research process with a grounded theory approach was presented, which also enhances the reader's ability to follow how the conclusions were drawn in the present study and to evaluate the quality of the conclusions.

In the reporting of the conducted study, the informants are presented for evaluation of the neutrality of the gathered data. In qualitative research the researcher is a key instrument in the process – not an outsider (Miles and Huberman 1994). The researcher's role as a researcher was described to everyone participating in the study, and that the data would be a part of the gathered data in an empirical study published in the researcher's thesis. Ten (10) of the interviewed informants were known to the researcher beforehand which was experienced to enhance the confident and relaxed feeling of those being interviewed, which in turn enhances the reliability of the data. However, all informants that were students (13) were unknown to the researcher beforehand.

As has been expressed by Charmaz (2000) “a constructivist approach necessities a relationship with respondents in which they can cast their stories in their terms” (525). The interviews were conducted in privacy in a comfortable milieu and no informant was in a hurry so it is believed that the data is trustworthy. In the group of young adults, all informants were students and unfamiliar to the researcher in advance. However, the double role as their teacher in their branding course and as the researcher may have an influence on what the students wrote in their accounts if someone experienced some expectations from the researcher's part concerning the texts. It was, however, thoroughly pointed out that there are no expectations on what they should write and they were encouraged to write freely for as long as they wanted. To conclude, it is believed that the study meets the requirements of objectivity.

**Reliability** refers to the consistency of the research process, whether the study has been executed with reasonable care (Miles & Huberman 1994). The crucial evaluation of reliability in the conducted study concerns the research question posed to the informants and the answers they provided to that question. The question in the original Finnish language, “Mitä sinulle tulee mieleen Anttilasta?” is a question that suggests reflections on the image. It is, however, difficult to translate exactly into English. It can be questioned whether the whole interview reflects the image of the company or only parts of it. This question is relevant as the definitions of the concept of corporate image vary from relatively narrow, including mainly the name and the nomenclature of the company, to very broad ones. In this study, initially a broad working definition “the informant's idea of a company” has been used, as the aim of the study is to provide new understanding of consumers' image constructions. Hence, all that which informants reflect upon has been considered as images of the company.

The **internal validity** of a conducted study is evaluated based on the strategies used in the conducted study for ‘true’ and fair reporting of participants’ ideas. In other words, are the findings credible to the people we study, and to the readers of the study? Do the findings make sense (Miles & Huberman 1994)? Following the emic perspective, the findings should make sense to the target of the study, the informants and other consumers. Five informants took part in a videotaped group interview (study 3) and commented and discussed the written accounts. Additionally, seven informants, who took part in study 2, wrote in their learning diaries about the conducted study and the preliminary findings and considered them authentic. The internal validity of the study is enhanced additionally through the chosen method, which aims at emerging conceptualizations through constant interaction with the phenomenon in order to understand it. The use of complementary methods and data sources also produced converging conclusions that enhance the authenticity of the present study, although interviews were found to produce the richest data.

Additionally, Glaser (1992) has argued that research conducted with a grounded theory approach solves the problems of fit<sup>29</sup>, work, relevance and modifiability as validity criteria of the research.

A well constructed grounded theory will meet its four most central criteria: fit, work, relevance, and modifiability. If a grounded theory is carefully induced from the substantive area its categories and their properties will fit the realities under study in the eyes of subjects, practitioners and researchers in the area. If a grounded theory works it will explain the major variations in behavior in the area with respect to the processing of the main concerns of the subjects. If it fits and works the grounded theory has achieved relevance. The theory itself should not be written in stone or as a “pet,” it should be readily modifiable when new data present variations in emergent properties and categories. The theory is neither verified nor thrown out, it is modified to accommodate by integration of new concepts. When these four criteria are met, then of course the theory provides a conceptual approach to action and changes and accesses into the substantive area.” (Glaser 1992, 15)

Emergent categories usually prove to be the most relevant and the best fitted to the data. As they are emerging, their fullest possible generality and meaning are continually being developed and checked for relevance. Verification of theory aims at establishing relatively few major uniformities and variations on the same conceptual level. The generation of theory should aim at achieving much diversity in emergent categories, synthesized at as many levels of conceptual and hypothetical generalization as possible (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 37-38).

**External validity** refers to the evaluation, whether the conclusions drawn from a study are transferable to other contexts. As mentioned before, qualitative research usually aims at discussing in what regard the researcher assumes or argues that the study has general validity beyond the individual case explored. Hence, the explained phenomenon

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<sup>29</sup> Glaser and Strauss (1967, 2) emphasize that theory worked out with a grounded theory approach must fit the situation being studied, and work when put into use. By “fit” they mean that “categories must be readily (not forcibly) applicable to and indicated by the data under study,” and by “work” they mean “they must be meaningfully relevant to and be able to explain the behavior under study. The theory must also be readily understandable for academics, students and laymen.”

should be related to larger contexts, which is an act of generalizing the findings to a higher level of abstraction. In chapter five (5) the aim is to do this in relation to corporate image research in general. Moreover, the findings were discussed in relation to other researchers' findings within the field and also within psychology concerning memory in chapter four (4), which provides ground for a general discussion of generalization on how far the results can be generalized among people in other contexts and over time. This discussion is also provided in chapter five (5).

In sum, emphasis on transparency was made throughout the study including the research process and analysis, making choices and conclusions. Each area was made as explicit to the reader as possible so that the reader could be convinced of the conclusions drawn.

In the next chapter, the findings will be presented.

#### 4 CONSUMERS' IMAGE CONSTRUCTIONS AND THE TEMPORAL DIMENSION THEREIN

In this chapter the data analysis and the generated view on consumer constructed corporate images, the temporal dimension, and image heritage in the consumer constructed corporate images are presented. The overall purpose of this study is to enhance the understanding of how consumers construct their corporate images. Based on the pre-understanding from the first explorative study, the focus for the second, selective phase of the analysis focused on the temporal dimension in the consumer's corporate image constructions. The empirical research problem: *How do consumers construct their corporate images*, was specified based on the emerged core category to *the temporal dimension in the consumer's image constructions*.

The analysis and the structure in this chapter follow the logic of a grounded theory research approach. First, the analysis in the open phase is presented. The analysis provided an emergent pre-understanding of image constructions and the temporal dimension in the image construction. As categories are discovered by examination of the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 3), the data is presented thoroughly in order to illustrate how the pre-understanding is grounded in data. The temporal dimension in the image constructions emerged from the data and was selected as the core category since the image constructions were based on the informants' earlier experiences, indicating that a temporal dimension is present in all consumer constructed corporate images. The open phase of the study was completed when the core category was chosen.

Thereafter, the selective phase of the analysis is presented. This second phase of the analysis is based on the whole data set, which was collected on theoretical sampling. The analysis generated a view of the dynamics in the consumers' image construction process due to the temporal dimension.

The third phase in the analysis is the theoretical phase, in which the findings are compared with other researchers' findings on dynamics in consumers' corporate image construction processes, and especially on the temporal dimension in the image construction, namely on memory. This phase of the research process is called the socialization phase by Glaser and Strauss (1967), in which the researcher socializes with other researchers' findings.

Finally, the proposed conceptualization of the temporal dimension in the consumers' corporate image construction process, the concept of image heritage, is presented. It is proposed that the concept of image heritage is "a relevant theoretical abstraction about what is going on in the area studied" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, 23). Moreover, image heritage is grounded in the emergent dynamic view of corporate image construction processes, and hence, this view of images will also be discussed.

#### **4.1. Open phase: Pre-understanding of image constructions**

In this first inductive open phase of the research process, the aim is to find an emergent core category. For obtaining the maximum openness of the data and the emergent theory - theoretical sensitivity – the data is approached with as few predetermined ideas as possible. Categories and their properties are also named to depict the idea the informants have expressed. Hence, the purpose is to come as close to the informants' way of thinking as possible. The open phase ends when a core category has been found.

In this first open phase the data was carefully read through paying attention to which easy-to-understand everyday life categories or otherwise intelligible categories does the text consist of? Already in the end of this open phase a rough definition of image constructions is provided.

Each interview in the first explorative study will be described according to a certain format. First, an overview on how the informant constructs his/her image of the company is presented. Next, categories and properties that emerged from the data are presented and discussed.

In the analysis, the informant's image constructions were viewed as a subjective company-related experience. The focus was on all experiences the informant relates to the company, and especially on all the forms these experiences take.

The first question concerning the data was “what is essential to the images defined by those who experience it?” The purpose of this question was to identify the themes that emerged. The second question was (2) “What defining properties or characteristics do the informants attribute to the constructed images?” The third question posed was (3) “What represents most of the variety and why?” In the presentation of the first open phase of the analysis, the aim was to show the complexity of image construction conveyed in the interviews, as this study became the foundation for the other studies conducted and the basis for the theoretical sampling in the data collection. Hence, the presentation of the open phase is a mix of concrete details with analytical categories, whereas in the second selective phase the chosen core category will be the main focus of the analysis.

First, findings from the group of young adults are presented, then the middle-aged group and finally findings from the group with the oldest informants. Glaser and Strauss (1967, 31) point out that the process of generating theory can be independent of how the theory is presented. The choice to start the presentation from the young adults is motivated by reasons of clarity, as it serves the readability when starting the presentation of the analysis from more simple and one-dimensional image constructions continuing with more complex multidimensional image constructions. The interviews were, however, conducted in another order. The first interviews were made with the middle-aged informants. Already in these interviews a temporal dimension in the image constructions emerged as the informants frequently referred to events in the past. In order to gather comparative data, the next interviews were conducted among the young adults and it emerged that these two informants hardly referred the past. Next, for gathering more comparative data, the last interviews were conducted among the older informants, who similar to the middle-aged informants, referred to past times.

As the accounts were analyzed immediately after the interviews, pre-understanding of the temporal dimension in image constructions developed early through constant comparison throughout the data collection.

#### ***4.1.1. Multiple, separated and contradictory images with a temporal dimension***

In the first stage of the analysis, all six interviews were open coded line by line and event per event. Open coding, preliminary categories, properties and dimensions are presented from the first interview to illustrate how open coding was conducted. The other five interviews in the exploratory study are presented based on categories and properties that emerged from them.

Except for the first question, “What does Anttila bring into your mind?” all the interviews were unique because interviewees were allowed to lead the discussion with their own set of topics concerning the company.

**In the first interview**, Laura (26, I) constructed her image around four themes: (1) how she experiences the company’s product selection, (2) price and (3) quality level and (4) location. She maintains the view that the company is located all over the country and sells various bulk products at reasonable prices. Her images are based on her experiences of the company and its advertisements. She defines herself as not being a frequent customer, although she has lately visited ‘Kodin Anttila’<sup>30</sup>, the company’s department store for home decoration, relatively often, as she is renovating her home. She has ‘a better image’ of this department than of the main Anttila. Her images are based upon how she, as a customer, has experienced the company as she doesn’t follow this specific department’s advertising any more than that of the main Anttila. Her images of the company are quite contradictory, which she realizes and reflects upon commenting that her experiences are better than the images she has of the company:

“Can’t be based on own experiences” (Laura, 26, I)

She separates her images between the different ‘sections’ within the company. She refers to multiple images as she differentiates her images between the owner company Kesko, the main department store Anttila, and one of its departments, ‘Kodin Anttila.’ Her images are based on adulthood experiences and the name of the founder is unknown to her. Laura is 26 years old and it is estimated that her images are constructed based on how she has experienced the company during approximately the last five to ten years. During this time, the department store for home decoration has changed its name to Kodin Ykkönen, but Laura systematically uses the old name, despite having visited the department several times lately.

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<sup>30</sup> The department for home furnishing and decoration, ‘Kodin Anttila’ (Home Anttila) changed its name 2002 to Kodin Ykkönen (“Home number one”), and dropped the name Anttila from the name.

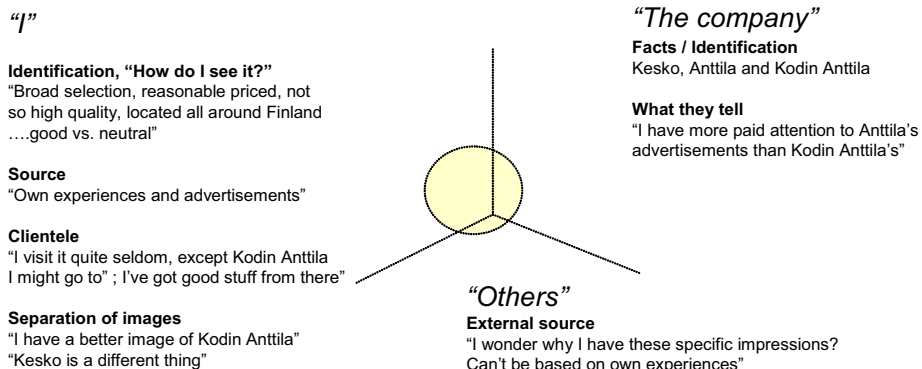


An overview of Laura's image constructions is depicted in figure 14. The three axes in the Figure refer to expressions revealing the source for her experience:

- 'I', refers to expressions in which the informant reflects upon how she herself has experienced the company (Mead 1934 (2004)). The distinction between 'I' and 'me' can be illuminated through Mead's text from 1934 "...in terms of memory. I talk to myself, and I remember what I said and perhaps the emotional content that went with it. The 'I' of this moment is present in the 'me' of the next moment" (Mead 1934 (2004), 30).
- 'The company' refers to expressions in which the informant reflects upon how the informant her/him-self assumes the company wants to be experienced.
- 'Others' refers to expressions in which the informant reflects upon how she experiences other peoples' experiences of the company. Additionally, 'others' also refers to other actors in the marketplace, for example, other companies and/or competitors.

It was not however, always easy to make the distinction between the sources in the interviews, although generally the informant was clear about the distinction.

In all interviews, an estimation of the emphasis made by the informant between the sources was made and is depicted by the circle in the middle of the Figure. The circle itself expresses the content in the interview.



### *Summary of the temporal dimension*

**Temporal focus:** recent times  
**Time span:** 5 years

**Figure 14 Overview of Laura's image constructions**

Laura emphasized her own experiences of the company in relation to the other possible sources. In temporal terms, her views were based on quite recent company-related

experiences. Her estimated time span of awareness of the company was estimated to be five to ten years, since she is 26 years old and she relates only to experiences in her adulthood. The temporal focus for interpreting company-related experiences into images is quite recent with respect to the company's history, although she is contradictory when she says that her images are not as good as her experiences of the company.

Based on the interview with Laura, open codes emerged as showed in Table 5. The flow in the interview is also shown as the questions and answers are presented chronologically.

**Table 5 Open-coding and preliminary categories and properties**

<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>Informant: Laura (26, I)</b>	<b>Open coding</b>	<b>Category</b> * Property
1. Question: What does Anttila bring into your mind?	Broad selection, reasonable prices, not so high quality. All around Finland	The company, how do I see it?	<b>Identification/Identity</b>  - The company  - Product, price, quality, location
	Separate image, Anttila and 'Kodin Anttila'	Separated image within the company. No recognition of the name change	<b>Unified/separated</b>  - separated image  • within the company  ( department stores/ horizontal)
	I visit it quite seldom	Not a frequent customer. Distancing the company "Not for me"	<b>Relationship with the company (perspective)</b>  Not a frequent customer (consumer)  <b>Feelings</b>  Long distance (distancing)

Interviewer	Informant:Laura (26, I)	Open coding	Category * Property
2. Question: What is your image based on?	Own experiences and advertisements	From where	<b>Source</b> - Marketing communication - Own experiences
	Never heard or visited the company in my childhood.	Temporal positioning. Recent knowledge, as a grown-up.	<b>Temporal dimension</b> - Short time span of awareness (~5-10 years)
	I wonder why I have these specific impressions. They are not based on anything rational, quite a lot of bulk products with a low quality level!?	Wondering about the source. Reflections on image and the source. Contrasting image and experience.	<b>Unified/separated</b> Contradictory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emotions vs. rational</li> <li>Conscious vs. unconscious</li> </ul>
	Can't be based on own experiences.	Others experiences	<b>Source</b> (Other people?)
3. Question: Do you know which chain it belongs to?	Kesko. But Kesko is completely different.	Separating the two	<b>Unified/separated</b> - Separation - Within the company (vertical)

Interviewer	Informant: Laura (26, I)	Open coding	Category * Property
	<p>I don't have a bad image of Anttila, I just don't use it.</p> <p>But I might go to Kodin Anttila. That one I have a better image of.</p>	<p>Evaluating image</p> <p>Distancing the company</p>	<p><b>Feeling/evaluation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Neutral image/long distance</li> <li>- Positive image/short distance</li> </ul>
	<p>I have been renovating at home and I've found a lot of reasonably priced stuff there.</p>	<p>Description of the relationship</p>	<p><b>Relationship with the company (perspective)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- customer (Multiple images)</li> </ul>
	<p>My opinion is based on own experiences not advertising. I have more paid attention to Anttila's advertisements than Kodin Anttila's.</p>	<p>Source of impression (no attention to the change of the name from Kodin Anttila to Kodin Ykkönen)</p>	<p><b>Source</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Marketing communication</li> <li>- Advertisements</li> </ul>
<p>4. Question: Do you remember Kalle Anttila</p>	<p>No. Who is that?</p>	<p>No knowledge of past times.</p>	<p><b>Temporal dimension</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time span of awareness ~5-10 years</li> <li>- Temporal focus: present time</li> </ul>

The preliminary emergent categories based on the interview were:

1. Identification/Identity “How do I see it?”
2. Relationship with the company “Who is it for?”
3. Unified vs. separated images “Single/Multiple/Contradictory images”
4. Feelings, emotional distance to the company, evaluation

5. Sources for experiencing the company “What are my sources?”
6. Temporal dimension “When?”

Next, all the emerged categories and properties from all interviews in the exploratory study are presented.

#### ***4.1.2. Emergent categories and properties through comparison***

**Few-dimensional and contradictory image constructions** were depicted by Sanna

“Middle-class image...Basic-line shop ...also high-class products.” “If you want something cheap...for sure good price-quality level!” (Sanna, 21, I)

Few-dimensionality and contradictory images emerged based on how she describes the company ranging from cheap prices, middle-class to high-class products. She does not separate between the different departments or sections, so she depicts a relatively few-dimensional view of the whole company. However, Sanna’s image constructions can be depicted as contradictory based on her expressions of basic-line versus high class, cheap prices versus middle-class.

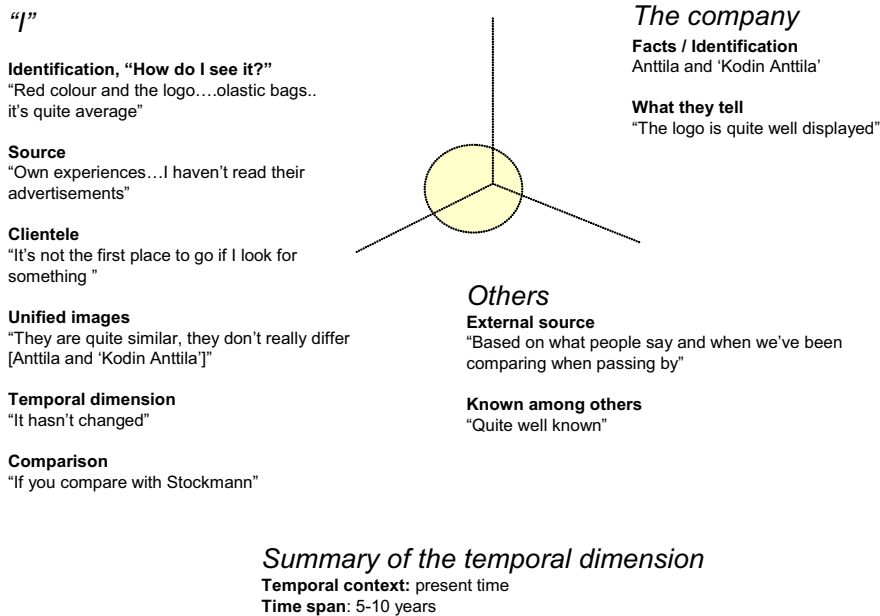
Sanna’s images were constructed based on how she had experienced the company when passing by, through comparison with other companies and based on a social dimension, ‘what other people say’ about the company.

Her image has remained similar to what it was ‘earlier’, but it is difficult to say, based on the interview, how long her time span of awareness is as she is only 21 years old, but it is here estimated to 5-10 years, given her age and her comment that the company has not changed since her childhood. She depicts Anttila as a shop she doesn’t go to on purpose or when looking for something special, whereas she might go to Kodin Anttila if she wants something cheap.

Sanna compares Anttila to another Finnish department store, Stockmann<sup>31</sup>, and distinguishes them based on their images. Hence, comparison within a branch is introduced.

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<sup>31</sup> Stockmann is a prestigious department store in Finland



**Figure 15 Overview of Sanna's image constructions**

Sanna depicts other people as a source for experiencing the company. Other peoples' influence was added as a property to the 'sources' category. Sanna compared the case company to another department store in Helsinki, as a result, 'comparison' was added as a new category with the property 'within the same branch.' Few-dimensional image construction was added as a property to the category 'character of the image construction.' In conclusion, Sanna's interview provided one new category with a property and two new properties to the previous ones.

In sum, new categories and properties that emerged based on Sanna's interview were:

- New category: 7. Comparison; new property: Within the same branch
- Category 5. Source; new property: other people
- Category 3. Unified/Separated"; new property: few-dimensional image construction

Next, the middle-aged informants' interviews are analyzed.

### **Multiple images, temporal multidimensionality and sudden changes of image**

When analyzing the middle-aged informants' accounts, temporal multidimensionality emerged very clearly, as both informants had been aware of the company almost since it was founded, and remembered very well the early times in the company's history, the company's founder and its first decades. Temporal multidimensionality in image

constructions emerged especially concerning Mikko's images. His images of the department store for home decoration, 'Kodin Ykkönen,' had changed completely when he visited the department store for the first time. This quick change did not, however, influence his images of the main Anttila. From a temporal perspective, his images of these different department stores are thus based on different eras in the company's history. In the following, both interviews are analyzed in detail.

In the third interview, Mikko (48, I) constructs his images of the company based on how he experiences the two departments 'Kodin Anttila' and the 'main' Anttila. Mikko's images of the main Anttila are based on experiences 30-40 years back in time. Anttila is for him a bargain store, whereas his renewed images of Kodin Anttila are based on quite recent experiences of Kodin Anttila.

His images of the main Anttila have not been up-dated for at least ten years as he doesn't follow company actions nor visit the company. He relies on his old impressions and on his view of Anttila's reputation. Mikko's images of the main Anttila date back to the 1960's or 1970's, and he refers to the times when Anttila was in *Tennispalatsi*<sup>32</sup>, to the founder of the company, and the kind of company actions it was known for at that time. Regarding the main Anttila and from the company's perspective, Mikko is a consumer 'lost in the past.'

Mikko's interview depicts quite clearly four important elements in image constructions:

- (1) The temporal focus in the image constructions may not always be up-dated. They may be in the company's old times and previous eras and the consumer may not even be interested in up-dating his/her images:

"I don't have any other image than the old bargain store in *Tennispalatsi*....." (Mikko, 48, I)

Mikko separates temporally his images of the two department stores. Hence, he depicts a temporal multidimensionality in image constructions as the images are based on different temporal foci, and from the company's perspective, different eras in the company's history.

- (2) Separation of images within a company, leading to multiplicity in images concerning the company. Mikko expresses the difference as follows:

"I have a very positive image of 'Kodin Anttila' and I really wonder how can it even be so different than the one of Anttila. I haven't thought about it.....they both have their own identity."

- (3) How images change. Mikko's image of Kodin Anttila changed at once when he experienced something unexpected and different, when for the first time visiting Kodin Anttila:

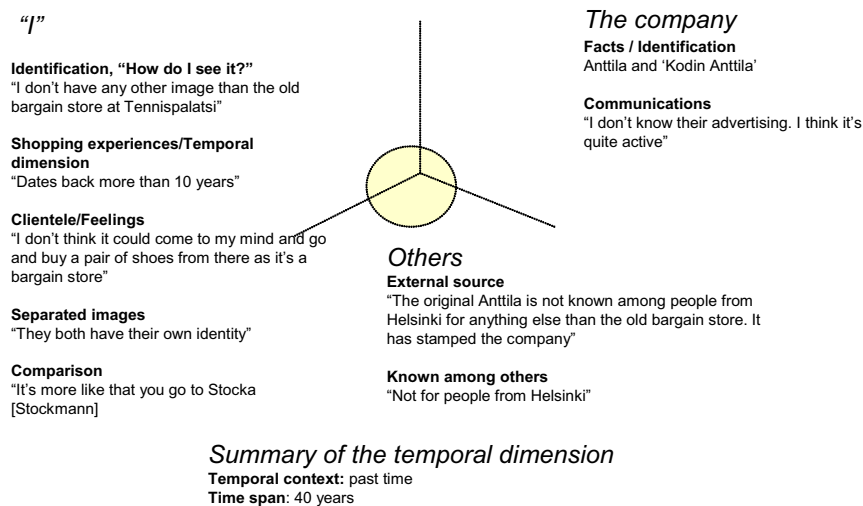
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<sup>32</sup> Finland's first bargain department store was founded by Kalle Anttila Oy in 1954 in Helsinki. The second department store was opened in Joensuu. Perhaps the most famous Anttila department store was founded in the beginning of the 60's and situated in a building called "Tennispalatsi" in Helsinki.

“I remember how surprised I was when I went to ‘Kodin Anttila’ for the first time – WOW! It was really a nice shop and my Anttila image changed at that very moment. However, it has not improved [the main] Anttila’s image.”

(4) There are also emotions involved when Mikko changes his evaluation of the department store from negative to positive.

As an illustration of a consumer’s separated images with different temporal foci regarding one company, an overview of Mikko’s image constructions of the main Anttila and Kodin Anttila are presented separately in Figure 16 and Figure 17. First, Mikko’s image constructions of main Anttila are presented.



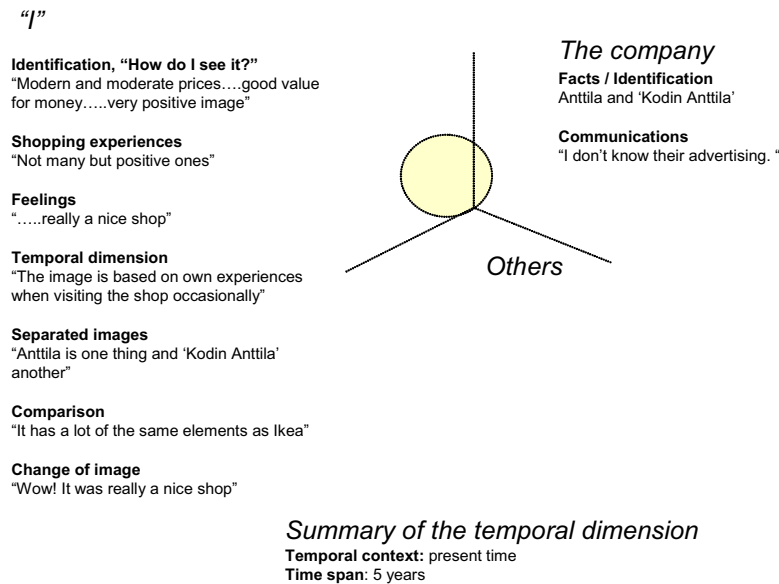
**Figure 16 Overview of Mikko’s image constructions of the main Anttila**

Mikko’s images are constructed based on experiences 20-30 years ago. He is well aware of the company’s history and refers way back, when saying:

“My image origins from the mail order company and Kalle Anttila.

Mikko’s temporal focus for image constructions is, hence, in past times, in company-related happenings in the 1960’s or 1970’s, which he also experiences as being the origin of the company’s reputation today. In Figure 17, Mikko’s image constructions of Kodin Anttila are depicted.





**Figure 17 Overview of Mikko's image constructions of 'Kodin Anttila'**

When comparing Mikko's images of the basically same company, some important differences can be recognized: (1) Anttila's image constructions are based on the 1960's and 1970's, whereas Kodin Anttila's in the 00's. (2) Mikko refers solely to how he himself has experienced the department Kodin Anttila, not to, for example, the company's branding activities, and although he experiences that the company is an active advertiser, he doesn't follow it. Neither does he refer to word-of-mouth nor reputation. Despite his positive image of 'Kodin Anttila' and his shopping experiences, he has not noticed that the department has changed its name from 'Kodin Anttila' to 'Kodin Ykkönen.'

In sum, new emergent categories and properties based on Mikko's interview are:

- New category: 8. Change; new property: Consumer related sudden change
- Category 1. Identification / identity; new property: first impression
- Category 3. Unified/separated images; new property: temporal separation
- Category 4. Feelings, emotions, emotional distance, evaluation; property: positive surprise
- Category 6. Temporal dimension; new property: focus: past times (40 years)
- Category 7. Comparison; new property: comparing the company with product brands

Next, the analysis of the second middle-aged informant's interview is presented.

**The price-conscious consumer Vepa** (49, I) is interested in shopping. He discusses shopping in general for three hours and how he has experienced shopping at Anttila.

Vepa constructs images of the company and its departments based on two major themes: the price level and the product offerings. He compares shopping experiences in Anttila based on the price level between bargain stores on the market. His expectations are cheap prices. Vepa distances himself from the company as he does not feel like a frequent customer even though he has bought quite a lot from Anttila, when he, twice a day, walks through the department store on his way to and from work.

He has read Anttila's advertising and has even made remarks about it when experiencing faults in the advertisements.

"I have made remarks on their advertising."

He constructs separated images within one department store as his images of Megastore (the section for records and games) and the main Anttila differ. He also makes a distinction between the main Anttila and Kodin Ykkönen. He is the only informant who uses the new name, Kodin Ykkönen, for the department for home decoration, comparing it with Ikea. Megastore he defines as one of the leading stores for young people in the field of records and games. Hence, he constructs multiple images of the company and is able to separate them based on different department stores, different sections within one department store and also on product level.

Despite his hundreds of experiences of the company, he still expects the company and all its departments to stand for cheap prices, constructing his images of the company based on old times:

This is due to the founder Kalle Anttila and the mail-order company, which used to be experienced as a cheap and easy way to do shopping...Kalle Anttila, it was in the 60's when my Granny bought her pullover from there, that's from where I remember it, and he sold mattresses. That is how it grew. People from the countryside used it, and I suppose that's why it was successful. Kalle, as we know, moved to America...my impression is that it is maybe the same as it was during Kalle Anttila's time, of course, it has grown, but the image is the same"

Vepa narrated parts of the company's history as he sees it and in light of his memories and values.

I suppose Kalle Anttila was a respected and admired person for his ability to create a good business. My Granny thought Anttila is the place to buy woollen socks and pants. I don't remember the slogan. He was respected. Whom did he marry? She was a celebrity as he was a well-known owner of a mail-order company. Then he sold the company for a good price. Good idea!

Today, the company has changed; it does not have any front man to identify with.

This one is not personified. Who is it? Nobody! In past times Kalle Anttila was always depicted in advertisements, his face, and he sold the products. Who is there today? The letter "A" ? In Kodin Anttila there is the number 1, this comes to my mind but nobody else. My personal personification is with the people when I walk through it, the sells personnel and the guards.

Vepa identifies the company with its employees and safe guards at that specific department, which is the most familiar to him. He expresses his concern of the company's [main Anttila] target images, as they are unclear to him.

“Images, what is Anttila aiming at? What are the images they hope to create?”

The present owner of the company, Kesko, is an important element in his image constructions and the awareness of the owner disturbs him as he experiences a discrepancy between his images of the present owner and Anttila.

Although he is very specific about his images of the company, which are based on a long history and numerous experiences of the company, he would still like the company to express its profile more specifically.

Vepa separates the department for home decoration from the main Anttila.

Well, the whole concept is different, it's for home decoration, which competes with Ikea and Asko<sup>33</sup> and those others, and on the other hand, it doesn't really remind you of the other Anttilas at all, this Kodin Ykkönen. The selection is different...This is how I see it, they are completely separated...I see them in a way as different companies”.

He feels that he is a frequent customer in the department for home decoration and finds it interesting to stroll around there.

“They have fun stuff displayed completely differently than in the other Anttilas. Interesting, not bulk!”

In Figure 18, Vepa's image constructions of the main Anttila are depicted.

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<sup>33</sup> Asko is a Finnish furniture store

“I”

**Identification, “How do I see it?”**

“Average, everything is average, nothing really good, not cheapest not most expensive. Kind of ‘+0’, except Megastore. ...a lot of stuff”

**Experiences**

I walk through it every day, every day except Saturdays and Sundays”

**Temporal dimension**

Kalle Anttila was in the 60’s when my Granny bought a pullover from there, from that I remember”j

**Feelings**

“I have often been disappointed [Anttila] vs. Kodin Ykkönen is interesting vs. Megastore is good for young people”

**Cientele**

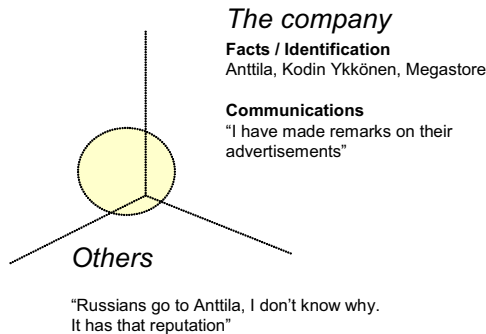
“I’m not a frequent customer [Anttila] vs. We have bought a lot from there [Kodin Ykkönen]”

**Separated images**

Anttila vs. Kodin Ykkönen vs. Megastore

**Comparison**

“Not so cheap as the real bargain stores[ Anttila] vs. Megastore.. Is certainly the leading [among record shops]”



**Summary of the temporal dimension**

**Temporal context:** [Anttila] past time, [Kodin Ykkönen] more recent times  
**Time span:** 40 years vs. 10 years

**Figure 18 Overview of Vepa’s image constructions of Anttila**

In sum, Vepa (49, I) is contradictory. On the one hand, the company is ‘the bargain store,’ and, on the other hand, he thinks they have moderate prices. He experiences Anttila to be quite different than Kodin Ykkönen and Megastore and distinguishes between the different sections within one department store, but also between the different department stores. He has followed Anttila’s and Kodin Ykkönen’s company actions since their early years and is well aware of the whole corporate history.

Vepa constructs multidimensional images based on multiple sources. The time span of awareness is long and he has numerous company-related experiences from many years. Additionally, he walks through the department store every day on his way to his work. He is involved with the company in the sense that he follows actively company actions and expresses his feelings about them also to the company. He is very price-conscious.

“It has to be cheap if I as a customer would buy products there that I can get cheaper elsewhere”.

Vepa can be described as a price-conscious consumer, which was added as a property to the “distance/perspective” category. Also the property ‘for others’ was added, as Vepa thinks the company is for ‘countryside people.’ To the ‘sources’ category other people’s experience was added.

“It’s where my Granny bought her pullover”.

To the category ‘unified/separated’ of images, separation within one department among sections in a department was added as a property. As Vepa was the only informant who used the new name of ‘Kodin Ykkönen,’ ‘company-related’ property was added to the ‘change’ category.

In sum, new emergent properties based on Vepa’s interview were:

- Category 3 Unified/separated image; new properties: temporal separation and sections within one department store
- Category 4. Feelings, emotions, emotional distance, evaluation; new properties: “For others” (country side people, foreigners, and price-conscious consumer
- Category 5. Sources; new property: other people’s experiences
- Category 7. Comparison; new property: within the branch (bargain stores)
- Category 8. Change; new property: company-related

Next, the analyses of the older informants’ interviews are presented.

**Important personal memories and experiences** became the central themes when Jorma (76, I) and Eine (65, I), a married old couple, constructed their images of the company. They shared the same experiences from the 1960’s to the 1980’s as entrepreneurs opposite Anttila in Tennispalatsi. Hence, the company became quite familiar to them from its very beginning. Despite same experiences, their images differed. Jorma constructed his images of ‘the old Anttila’ focusing on his admiration of the founder, ‘a pioneer of his time’ mentioning the founder’s remarkable market sensitivity, which can’t be recognized in the company today.

Jorma expresses collegial understanding of the company’s earlier eras in the 1960’s to 1980’s, as he himself was an entrepreneur during the same era. Hence, his perspective towards the company is that of an ‘entrepreneurial colleague.’ Sharing understanding and values are expressed as:

“A change is compulsory when going from a privately owned company to the system they have today.”

However, this perspective is grounded in past times as his perspective today is more that of a father than an employee, as his daughter works for Anttila. Both perspectives were added as properties in the category of distance/perspectives.

Jorma has been a customer since the early years, but he has up-dated his images along with the company’s history. Although he sees the company as it was during earlier times, he is, however, able to separate that specific image belonging to earlier times. His main images today are constructed on more recent times. Thus, temporal separation was added as a property to the ‘unified/separated’ category. In Figure 19 an overview of Jorma’s image constructions are given.

“I”

**Identification, “How do I see it?”**

“Today, mainly Kesko. Kesko is “K” like “kallis” (expensive)”.

**Feelings / Admiration**

“Kalle Anttila was a pioneer in his branch”  
“Today it does not have that same sensitivity”

**Temporal dimension**

I associate Anttila mainly to Kalle Anttila, that is, you could get whatever from the mail order, the first one in Finland if I remember right. It started from the basement at Tennispalatsi, opposite my working place”

**Clientele**

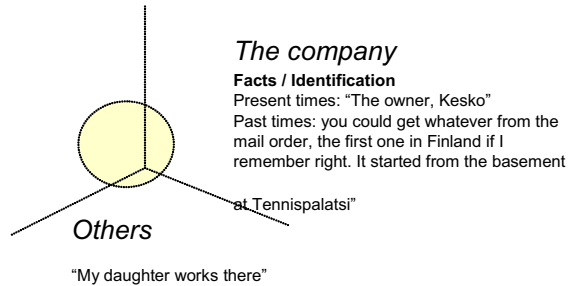
Frequent customer: “You can say we’ve bought quite a lot from there”. “At this age you think of from where you can get a parking place. It’s important that it is easily accessible”

**Unified images**

Anttila and Kodin Ykkönen

**Comparison /Identification**

“Anttila today is like any other store”



**Summary of the temporal dimension**

**Temporal context:** Quite recent times but with good active knowledge of the past.

**Time span:** 50 years

**Figure 19 Overview of Jorma’s image constructions**

In sum, new emergent categories and properties based on Jorma’s interview were:

- Category 2. Relationship with the company (perspective); new property: customer/entrepreneurial colleague (close relationship) and relative of an employee (close relationship)
- Category 3. Unified/ separated; new dimension: temporal separation
- Category 6. Temporal dimension; new dimension in the temporal focus property: multiple foci (past times and recent times)
- Category 8. Change; new property: Company-related change, and other peoples’ influence

Jorma’s wife **Eine** expresses concern for the image of her daughter’s working place. She is very concerned, stressing that they are very satisfied with the company today and that it has completely changed since the founder’s times. Today the company is different.

Past times: “At that time they sold all kinds of junk there”.

Present times: “We even bought a computer from there, very good service”.

She reflects upon twice during the interview that her perspective is that of a mother of an employee, and wonders if that may have an effect on her images of the company. The overview of Eine's image constructions is depicted in Figure 20.

*"I"*

**Identification, "How do I see it?"**

"Good quality, I can't say more, you'll get everything from there".

**Feelings**

"Very positive image" "good service"

**Temporal dimension /Separation**

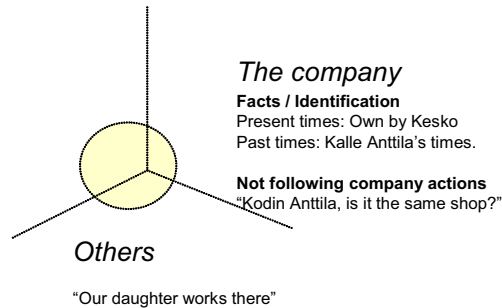
"remember, we worked in "Autotalo" opposite Anttila. It was wretched during Kalle Anttila's times. A lot of rubbish, you could never find anything. ..It has completely changed now when it is owned by Kesko.

**Clientele**

"That's were we bought...good service...we've bought a lot".

**Comparison /Identification**

"Anttila today is like any other store"



**Summary of the temporal dimension**

**Temporal context:** Quite recent times but with good active knowledge of the past.

**Time span:** 50 years

Unified and multidimensional images

**Figure 20 Overview on Eine's image constructions**

The change in her perspective from a consumer to a relative of an employee is dependent on an activity by other people, i.e. Anttila is her daughter's working place. The new setting with the company has also activated a change in her image constructions and in how she relates to the company, that is, the defensive approach she expresses. Accordingly, change of perspective was added as a property in the change category.

In sum, new properties emerged based on Eine's interview:

- Category 8. Change; new property: Other peoples' influence

Next, the final Table of categories and their properties is presented. The Table is the basis for comparison when categories were compared to other categories and properties, and also properties within a category were compared with each other.

Table 6 Emergent categories, properties and dimensions from the first study

Category	Property <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dimension</li></ul>	Illustrative quote
<b>1. Identity and Identification of the company</b>  Identifying the company, "How do I see it?"	<b>1. Company-related</b> (product, price, location, quality, value) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symbols</li> <li>• Marketing communications</li> <li>• Personification</li> </ul> <b>2. Consumer related</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First impression</li> <li>• Identify with Appreciation/sameness/identify</li> </ul>	<p>"Broad selection, reasonable prices, not so high quality. All around Finland". (Laura, 26, I); Anttila's red colour and logo, plastic bags (Sanna, 21, I)</p> <p>"I have interfered with their advertising" (Vepa, 49, I, Lawyer)</p> <p>My personal identification is with the sales personnel and the security guards". (Vepa, 49, I)</p> <p>"I remember how surprised I was when I went to Kodin Anttila for the first time –Wow, it was really a nice shop ( Mikko, 48, I)</p> <p>"A pioneer of his time"(Jorma, 76, I, Entrepreneur)</p>
<b>2. Relationship with the company (perspective)</b>	1. Consumer (not for me) 2. Customer (for me) 3. Customer/Mother of an employee (Multiple roles) 4. Customer/Entrepreneurial colleague/Father of an employee (multiple roles)	(Mikko, 48,I); Laura, 26, I)  (Vepa, 49, I; Eine, 65, I; Jorma, 76, I)  "Maybe my perspective influences"? (Eine, 65, I)  "A change is compulsory when going from a privately owned company to the system they have today".(Jorma, 76, I)



Category	Property <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dimension</li> </ul>	Illustrative quote
<b>3. Unified/separated images</b>	<p><b>1. One-dimensional</b> image of the company (coherent image)</p> <p><b>2. Few-dimensional</b></p> <p><b>3. Multiplicity of images</b></p> <p><b>4. Diversified/separated images</b> (multiple images)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within the company</li> <li>• Departments, sections (horizontal)</li> <li>• Vertical</li> <li>• Temporal separation</li> </ul> <p><b>5. Contradictory images</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional vs. rational</li> <li>• Conscious vs. unconscious</li> </ul>	<p>"They are quite similar" (Sanna, 21, I)</p> <p>Anttila and Kodin Anttila (Laura, 26,I, Mikko, 48, I; Vepa, 49,I)</p> <p>Anttila and Megastore, the section for records (Mikko, 48, I, Vepa,</p> <p>Kesko and Anttila</p> <p>Anttila reminds me basically of Kalle Anttila...today it reminds me basically of Kesko..(Jorma, 76, I)</p> <p>Mid-class image...Basic-line shop...also high-class products. If you want something cheap....for sure good quality-price level" (Sanna, 21, I); My image is from Kalle Anttila's time, the bargain store .....Anttila is not the cheapest one...mid-class, everything is mid-class except Megastore.....I feel betrayed at the cash desk as its cheaper elsewhere.....disturbs that you know the owner (Vepa, 49, I)</p>

Category	Property <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dimension</li> </ul>	Illustrative quote
<b>4.</b> <b>Feelings/emotions,</b> <b>emotional distance,</b> <b>evaluation</b>	<b>Surprise</b> (positive) <b>Defense</b> <b>Frustration</b> <b>“For me” (closeness)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It gives me value for money</li> <li>• Our daughter works there</li> </ul> <b>“For others” (distant)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where do the customer come from</li> <li>• Who are they?</li> </ul>	<p>“Wow” (Mikko, 48, I)</p> <p>“My daughter’s workplace” (Eine, 63, I)</p> <p>“I have made complaints about their advertising!” (Vep, 49, I)</p> <p>“I have got good stuff at reasonable prices” (Laura, 26, I , Kodin Anttila)</p> <p>”Yes we go there, our daughter works there” (Jorma, 76, I)</p> <p>It is for those from the countryside (Vepa, 49, I)</p> <p>Russian locomotive engineers(Jorma, 76, I); Russians go there (Vepa, 49, I)</p> <p>Not for Helsinkians (Mikko, 48, I); People from the countryside (Vepa, 49, I)</p> <p>“Megastore is for young people” (Vepa, 49, I)</p>

Category	Property • Dimension	Illustrative quote
<b>5. Sources</b> for experiencing the company	<b>1. Shopping experiences</b> <b>2. Other people's experiences</b>  <b>3. Observation:</b> Strolling around in the shop; window-watching  <b>4. Advertisements</b> <b>5. What people say (reputation)</b>  <b>6. Unaware of the source</b>	<p>"Own experiences"(Mikko, 48, I)</p> <p>Anttila is the place where my Granny bought her pullover" (Vepa, 49, I)</p> <p>"Comparing downtown when passing by"(Sanna, 21, I)</p> <p>(Sanna, 21, I; Vepa, 49, I; Laura, 26, I)</p> <p>"Based on what people say" (Sanna, 21, I)</p> <p>"Experiences and advertisements.....Experiences and impressions.....Can't be based on experiences...I have been following more advertisements from Anttila than Kodin Anttila" (Laura, 26, I);"</p>
<b>6. Temporal dimension</b>	<b>1. Time span of awareness</b> 50 years, 40 years, 5-10 years  <b>2. Temporal focus</b>  One focus (Past times, recent, present times)  Multiple foci	<p>My image originates from Kalle Anttila's mail order company in the 60's (Vepa, 49, I); I don't have any other image than the old bargain store at Tennispalatsi (Mikko, 48, I)</p>

Category	Property <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dimension</li> </ul>	Illustrative quote
<b>7. Comparison</b>	<b>1. Within the company</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sections, departments, department houses</li> </ul> <b>2. Within the same branch (bargain stores)</b> <b>3. With other companies</b> <b>4. With product brands</b>	Kodin Ykkönen, Anttila and Megastore (Vepa, 49, I)  Not so high an image as Stockmann (Sanna, 21, I)  Mikko, 48, I; Vepa, 49, I  Anttila is a Hyundai, in Kodin Anttila there is quite a lot of a Ford in it, Stockmann is a Volvo.(Mikko, 48, I)
<b>8. Change</b>	<b>1. Consumer related</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotions</li> </ul> <b>2. Company-related</b> <b>3. Other peoples' influence</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change of perspective</li> </ul> Emotions	Image change due to new experiences (Mikko, 48, I)  Name of the company (Vepa, 49, I)  "It [image] might be, that it is affected by, that we have this connection". Eine, 65, I)

Next a summary of the emergent categories and properties is given as well as a discussion on the conclusions drawn from the pilot study.

#### ***4.1.3. Summary and choice of core category***

The informants' image constructions were viewed as a subjective company-related experience. Hence, all experiences informants relate to the company and all forms the experience takes were the focus in the analysis for understanding *how the consumers construct their image of the company?* The first question posed to the data was (1) "what constructs the image?" in other words, what is essential to the image construction defined by the consumer? The second question posed, (2) "What defining properties or dimensions of properties does the informant express?", and third, (3) "What represents most of the variety in the image construction and why"?

In order to give an overview of the analysis, the categories, properties and dimensions are briefly discussed in this section as they form the basis for the second, selective, and third, theoretical phase in the analysis, focusing on the chosen core category.

All informants' image constructions were depicted by an overall Figure in which an estimation of which source of experience is the one the informant emphasizes when constructing corporate images. As estimation, all interviewees relied mostly on their own interpretation and experiences of the company, with relatively little emphasis on other peoples' experiences or opinions. Reputation, for example, did not emerge as an important source for the informant's image construction. On the contrary, it seemed to be something the informants were aware of, but it didn't override the image construction. Neither did the interviewees rely on the company's expressions about itself, rather emphasis was on their own interpretations of company actions. In conclusion, the informants constructed their images mainly based on how they themselves had experienced the company over time.

The most salient category or dimension of a category that emerged in all accounts was the **temporal dimension** in the image constructions. All the informants referred back in time expressing something they had experienced earlier, either memories from past times, contrasting present times with past, or they provided past times as explanations and the basis for present images. In short, the temporal dimension was chosen as the core category for the second selective phase in the study and as the basis for theoretical sampling.

(1) Temporal dimension in image construction;

- The awareness time span: How long back in time of company related experiences from multiple sources do the informants refer to?
- Experiences during the time span: What experiences form the basis for image constructions today and when did they happen?
- Temporal focus for image constructions: What period is the informant mainly focused on as a basis for his/her image constructions today?

In the interviews, informants referred to experiences over a varied period of time, some referred five to ten years back in time, and some for 40-50 years. All informants over 40 years mentioned the founder Kalle Anttila and the company's earliest eras, as they had been aware of the company for 40-50 years. The two youngest informants did not however, mention spontaneously or even recognize when asked, the founder of the company.

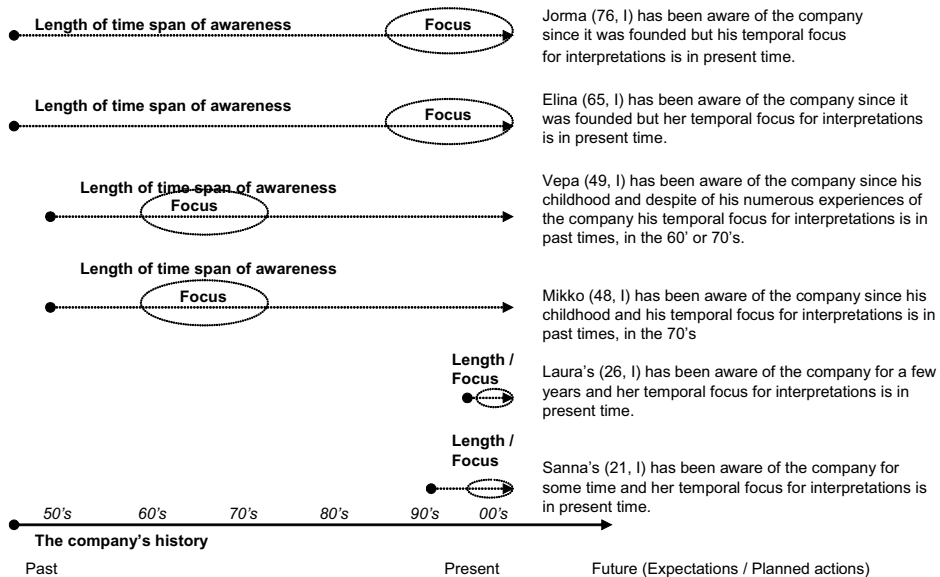
The temporal focus as the main basis for image constructions differed among the informants. Some of the informants 'live in the present,' focusing on the company based on quite recent company-related experiences, whereas some informants are focused on experiences from the 1970's and 1980's as their basis for image constructions today. Some informants' image constructions were few-dimensional, 'single' images of the whole company, whereas others constructed multiple images which varied based on the temporal focus. For example, the image of main Anttila could be focused on the 1970's,

whereas the image of the department for home decoration on the 00's. In conclusion, image constructions emerged to be multi-dimensional and based on multiple sources and temporal foci. However, it emerged that images today become future expectations despite the temporal focus they are based upon.

During the period the informant had been aware of the company, some informants had a constant flow of experiences, whereas some had only few and some had not experienced anything in relation to the company for the past ten years. However, despite a constant flow of experiences by some informants' (Vepa, 49, I) images, and hence, expectations of the company were also based on past times, whereas others had not paid attention to anything special during the last twenty years (Mikko, 48, I) that would have updated their temporal focus.

I do not associate Anttila with anything else than the old bargain store in Tennispalatsi. My association stems from Kalle Anttila's mail order shop, which sold very cheaply mattresses or whatsoever, as long as it was cheap. This was the theme of Anttila and it has to a large extent marked the company." (Mikko, 48, I).

As an overview, in Figure 21, the awareness time span and the temporal focus that emerged in the exploratory study are depicted.



**Figure 21** Estimations of the awareness time spans and temporal foci in the exploratory study

Based on the interviews, it is suggested that earlier experiences are the basis for image constructions today. Images are not constructed from an empty table or *tabula rasa*, but instead on earlier experiences. Images start to develop from the first company-related experiences the person has. Images emerging over time can be depicted as a mental

relationship the individual has with the company over time. In the exploratory study, images did change only when a change in the perspective for evaluation was activated or a strong experience changed the images from one experience. In sum, all accounts reflected how the informants had experienced the company over the years.

**The type of relationship** the informant experienced to have with the company emerged based on the perspective the informant took towards the company when constructing the corporate image. The perspective and the type of relationship was seldom singular; for example, that of a customer or a relative of an employee, but multiple perspectives emerging at the same time. The perspectives guided how the informant constructed her/his images. However, some informants with multiple perspectives of the company were able to analytically separate their image constructions based on the different perspectives. Perspectives may change or new perspectives may emerge over time, thus having a temporal dimension.

(2) The type of relationship and perspectives for image constructions

- One perspective (Consumer, customer or relative)
  - Temporal dimension (starting and end point of perspectives)
  - Informant's personality (e.g., price conscious consumer)
  - The utilitarian perspective (what can the company offer me?)
- Multiple perspectives (Consumer, customer and relative of an employee)
  - Temporal dimension (starting and end points of perspectives)

Dimensions of a property in the category emerged as the informant's personal traits. The most salient dimension in all accounts was the utilitarian focus for the image constructions. The image was not only constructed as an image per se, but as a perspective of "What can the company offer me?"

Based on the explorative study, it is suggested that people construct images of companies based on the type of relationship they have with the company, which indicates a perspective for image constructions. Perspectives can be one or many and people can consciously also separate their image constructions based on the perspective they choose. Perspectives may also change but memories from previous perspectives may stay in mind. Multiple perspectives result in a multiplicity in images.

**Unified vs. separated images.** Unified, one-dimensional, and "gestalt" like images of the whole company were constructed by one of the informants. These unified images depicted a singularity in the image construction, whereas the other informants' image constructions were multidimensional, varying within the company between departments (one department may have a set of images and another may have another set of images), and sections of department stores. Hence, vertical and horizontal variance was identified. Multidimensionality also varied based on how many perspectives and which temporal focus the images were based upon. Multidimensionality in some informant's

images also resulted in contradictory images, both temporally, emotionally, since the informant was consciously aware of some of the images but unconscious about others.

(3) Unified vs. separated images:

- One-dimensional (unified and singular image of the whole company)
  - Temporal dimension
- Multiple separated images
  - Horizontal within the company (department stores)
    - Temporal separation (sections within one department)
  - Vertical within the company (departments, sections)
    - Temporal separation (separated images for various owners')
- Multiplicity (diversified multiple images within the company)
  - Temporal dimension
  - Contradictory images
    - Emotional vs. rational and conscious vs. unconscious

Despite the multiplicity in images, the informants were able to **distinguish** between the different images. From the company's perspective, horizontal separation emerged between the departments and vertical separation within the company on various levels of the organization. Temporal separation emerged as some informants had different images of the different owners of the company and/or they separated images within the company at different periods of time.

Moreover, it emerged that it was not always easy, or even necessary, for the informants to construct a harmonious, single and coherent 'gestalt-like' image of the company. Images were based on numerous experiences from many sources, which in turn, might result in contradictory images. Image constructions were found to be an ongoing process, not always conscious to the informant. This could be noticed based on two informants' expressions of genuine surprise concerning their own multiple and contradictory images of the company (Mikko, 48, I; Laura, 26, I)<sup>34</sup>. In conclusion, companies have a multiplicity of images.

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<sup>34</sup> "All meaning constructing processes involve moments of reconstruction and construction" (Ugla 2002, 358).



The informants expressed during the interviews that the company-related experiences over time involved a multiplicity of **feelings, emotions, distance to the company and evaluation of the company**. The emotions ranged from positive surprise to frustration, and from defending the company to indifference towards the company. Feelings emerged based on whom the informant felt the company was targeted to. Some depicted a long mental distance towards the company as they experienced it to be for countryside people, whereas others experienced a short mental distance, feeling that the company was for them. Their evaluation ranged from positive to negative.

(4) Feelings, emotions, distance towards and evaluation of the company

- Emotions
  - Temporal dimension
- Distance as a feeling
  - Close “For me” vs. long “Not for me”
    - Who are the customers, what do they look like, where do they come from?
  - Temporal dimension
- Evaluation
  - Positive to negative

The informants constructed their images of the company based on how they had experienced the company over the years from various **sources**.

(5) Sources for image constructions

- Own experiences
  - Temporal dimension
- Other people’s experiences and influence
  - Temporal dimension
  - Reputation
- The company
  - Marketing communication
    - Temporal dimension
  - Advertisements / Window display / Logo / Shopping bags

- Temporal dimension

The constructed images were based on multiple experiences over time from many sources. Some of the respondents are frequent customers (Vepa, 49, I; Eine, 65, I; Jorma, 76, I) and some almost never visit the company (Mikko, 48, I; Sanna, 21, I). Some of the respondents follow company actions actively (Vepa, 49, I; Sanna, 21, I; Laura, 26, I), whereas some are unaware of them (Mikko, 48, I). Some refer to the reputation of the company (Eine, 65, I; Mikko, 48, I; Sanna, 21, I; Laura, 26, I) and some only to their own or relatives' experiences (Vepa, 49, I). Reputation was, however, found to be one source for experiencing the company, but it did not override in importance how the informant him-/herself had experienced the company. Hence, the often unlimited amount of experiences from many sources can be difficult for a company to influence on, especially when they are grounded in past experiences over a long time period. Especially as 'other sources', like family members as well have a time dimension in their own experiences, which can, through the knowledge they share extend the awareness time span for the informant till e.g. early years in the company's history.

All informants **identified** the company based on how they had experienced the company in relation to either company-specific identity expressions or their own company-related experiences.

(6) Identity and identification of the company

- Company-related identity expressions
  - Product, price level, location, quality, value, identity symbols, marketing communication, personnel
- Consumer-related identity experiences
  - First impression
  - Self-identification with the company

**Comparison** emerged frequently, specifying how the informant experiences, for example, the company in relation to other entities. Hence, comparison suggests the relationship between the company and its competitors or the relationship between past times and present times. Through comparison, the informant's specified their images in relation to what they compared the images with.

(7) Comparison

- With own earlier experiences
  - Temporal dimension
- With how the company was earlier
  - Temporal dimension

- With other companies in the same branch (retailing)
  - Temporal dimension
- With other companies within the same niche (bargain stores)
  - Temporal dimension
- With other actors on the market
  - Temporal dimension
- With information from other people
  - Temporal dimension

The images informants constructed emerged to be **stable** over the years or they **changed** due to certain reasons.

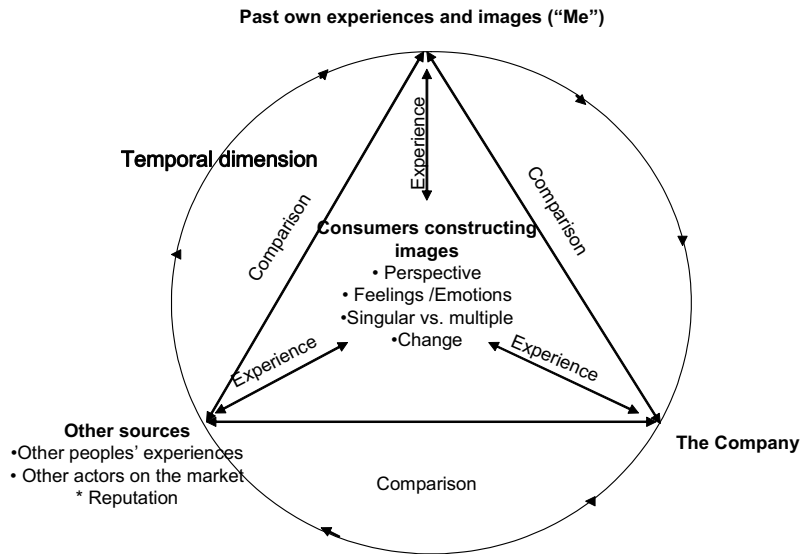
#### (8) Change

- Stability – no changes
- Own experiences as a source for change
- Company actions as a source for change
- Change due to other people's actions

Changes that emerged in image constructions resulted in new, up-dated image constructions. Changes were due to significant events. Charmaz (2000) has defined significant events as

“a significant event stands out in memory, because it has boundaries, intensity and emotional force....” (Charmaz 2000, 516).

**In conclusion**, the comparison of differences and similarities among codes not only generated categories, but also generated generalized relations among the codes and categories. A summary of the relationships between the categories that emerged in the explorative study is presented in Figure 22.



**Figure 22 Relationships between emergent categories in the explorative study.**

The Figure depicts how the informants in the exploratory study through comparison with earlier experiences from multiple sources over time construct their corporate images. Expressed in line with the grounded theory approach, the Figure depicts ‘what is going on in the data.’

**In sum**, based on the explorative study, consumers’ corporate image constructions were found to emerge through comparison with earlier experiences from multiple sources over time. Emotions and other elements relevant for the consumer emerged as drivers for image changes. All elements in the informants’ image constructions were found to be based on how the informants had *experienced, from multiple sources*, the company *over the years* they had been aware of the company. These image constructions from multiple sources over time became *the content of earlier images* based on which images were constructed in the present. The temporal focus reveals that images are not necessarily constructed based on chronologically organized earlier experiences. On the contrary, any earlier experience can be influential for image constructions today. In other words, the latest experiences did not necessarily become the focus for the informant’s image constructions today, hence, image constructions were not found to be cumulative processes, and on the contrary, they emerge based on some specific earlier experience remembered by the consumer, some memories being more important than others. Therefore, the main focus for image constructions may as well be quite back in the company’s history. The informant may not have up-dated her/his view of the company through new experiences or, s/he may not have experienced anything so significant that it would have changed earlier images.

Image constructions emerged to be based on a limited number of experiences from few sources among those informants with a shorter time span of awareness<sup>35</sup> of the company. These informants' foci for image constructions were on quite recent company-related experiences.

Informants with a long time span of awareness constructed their images based on a multiplicity of company-related experiences from multiple sources over time. These informants focused either on past and/or recent company-related experiences. In Figure 23 the pre-understanding that emerged concerning the consumers' corporate image constructions is summarized.



1. Awareness time span	Short	Long
2. Awareness of the company's history	Little or no awareness of the company's history	Well aware of the company's history
3. Perspectives	Single or few	Single, few or multiple
4. Temporal focus	Recent times	Recent and/or past times.
5. Image constructions	"Single image" Few sources 	Multiple images, contradictory images, multiple sources 
Conclusions	Images constructed from quite recent experiences: <b>one- or few-dimensional images based on a limited number of sources over time</b>	Images constructed from both past and recent experiences: <b>multifaceted network of images based on multiple sources over time</b>

Figure 23 Emerged pre-understanding of consumers' corporate image constructions

Based on the analysis, the category that accounted for most of the variation in the image constructions was the temporal dimension. Temporality is present in most categories as almost all categories represent findings that happened at a certain point of time. Hence, the selection of the core category was based on theoretical ideas created based on relationships between the categories and their properties.

<sup>35</sup> "The essence of the brain is conscious awareness – the "page" onto which the ever-changing contents of perceptions (and thoughts) are written. This page is never really blank, even during sleep". (Solms and Turnbull 2002, 275).

In the next selective and theoretical phase of the analysis, the core category, the temporal dimension, will be the focus in the analysis. The selected core category will form the basis in the selective and theoretical analysis of the whole data set in order to be verified as much as possible in the course of the research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

The data in the second phase of the analysis will be intertwined with each other continuously and analyzed from the perspective of the core category. As a result, the preliminary categories may also change and new categories may emerge.

#### **4.2. The selective phase: Temporal dimension in consumers' image constructions**

In this second, deductive and selective phase of the research process, theoretical sampling is employed for data collection based on the hypothesis generated from the analysis in the open phase. The whole corpus of data will be analyzed based on the chosen core category.

Based on the pre-understanding from the explorative study, an empirical research problem for the selective phase was formulated as "*how can the temporal dimension in consumers' image constructions be understood?*" The aim is to gain an understanding of the temporal dimension in consumers' image constructions. Four specific research problems were specified for the selective phase of the study, namely, to deepen the understanding of:

- (1) the time span of company awareness,
- (2) the content of the awareness, and
- (3) the temporal focus for image constructions. Additionally, the aim was to
- (4) develop the understanding of how images change.

In this selective phase 35 accounts were analyzed. The temporal distinction between past, present and future times is grounded on the tempus and content of the expression. In a strict sense, "past times" is everything that is not expressed as "now". Past time in this analysis is scaled with an interval of approximately 10 years in the Figures and Tables. The expression "recent experiences" is used to position experiences from approximately the last five years. A more exact temporal positioning is not considered necessary in the context of this study, as the purpose is not to provide exact data for the company, but to enhance general understanding of the temporal dimension in image constructions from the consumer's perspective per se. Thus the approach is conceptual.

##### **4.2.1. Awareness time span**

The awareness time span depicts the period of time in the company's history from where the informant's company-related associations and memories may stem. Thus, the time span means *how long* back into the company's history the informant refers to.

All informants referred back in time, and some even throughout the company's history till the very beginning of it, but seen from their own perspective, and as interpreted by the informant. The awareness time span depicts company-related experiences spontaneously recalled by the informant, regardless of whether they were their own or other people's experiences or other kinds of information<sup>36</sup>. The awareness time span can be described as a 'metaphoric (mental) relationship' with the company over time. In every account, a starting point for the awareness time span emerged, and therefore an approximation of the 'metaphoric relationship' with the company could be specified. The end point emerged either as the moment for the interview, the 'present,' or through expressed future expectations and/or actions regarding the company. Next, the awareness time span will be discussed based on the starting and end points in the time span.

#### *4.2.1.1. Earliest memories as the starting point of the consumer's awareness time span*

The earliest company-related associations and memories mentioned by the informants emerged to specify a starting point for the informant's awareness time span of the company. Based on the time span, company-related associations might stem and become the basis for image constructions today. From the company's perspective, the time span depicts the period in the company's history which can be recalled by the informant and from where associations may stem. These experiences depict at the same time the company's history seen through the informant's eyes. 'Inherited' knowledge and experiences from sources other than the informant's own personal experiences with the company could expand the awareness time span even till times before the informant's birth.

In the present data, a few of the young informants referred solely to quite recent company-related experiences, whereas the majority of the informants referred to experiences both from recent and past times, and hence, the awareness time span ranged from 15 to 50 years. Although most of the youngest informants' earliest experiences were either childhood or teenage experiences, some of the youngest informants referred to times much before their birth. Tiina, Tony and Tero, refer to learnt knowledge of the early years in the company's history:

"Anttila is an old institution, started with the mail order catalogues and out-of-them build a nation wide network of shops" (Tiina, 23, A).

"Anttila is a department store, whose position has been solid and stable for ages" (Tony, 23, A).

"If I have understood right, Anttila has been around since the 50's or 60's so the company is well known already based on its long age" (Tero, 26, A).

Especially Tero is aware of the company's history for more than 20 years before his birth. His awareness time span may be longer than the informant's own age, as also young informants may well be aware of the early years in the company's history.

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<sup>36</sup> "The way the world is" – as we perceive it – is in fact what we have *learned* about the world – as we *remember* it. Solms, M. and O. Turnbull (2002). *The brain and the inner world. An introduction to the neuroscience of subjective experience*. New York, Other Press.

When young informants referred to experiences from their childhood, the experiences were 15-20 years back in time:

“My earliest associations of Anttila are from my childhood. I visited Anttila with my mother and it had two stores. As a small child I especially liked the escalators, which were rare in a small town like Kajaani. Already at those day Anttila was the place from where you could get sewing equipment and yarn and where you could go to look at new curtain material” (Tiina, 23, A).

Childhood memories! Sausage and French fries upstairs at Anttila in Hämeenlinna!

Sanna and Laura did not know about the founder Kalle Anttila and both informants' associations were focused on quite recent times:

“Broad selection of products, reasonable prices, not so high quality, located around Finland, Kodin Anttila is another thing” (Laura, 26, I).

“Anttila's red color and the logo. Quite well-known, quite cheap, not so high quality, middle class, the plastic bag, located around Finland, a little bit like, you know, mid-class.....it has not changed over the years” (Sanna, 21, I).

Their awareness time span is 5 – 10 years long, and from the 1990's.

Some middle-aged informants had become familiar with the company in their adulthood, as they spend their childhood in a city where there were no Anttila department stores. Neither had they experienced the company in any other ways until they moved to a city with an Anttila store (Vaula, 47, I and Kirsi, 48, I). The family's ideological standpoint was another reason for Kirsi (48, I) not to visit the company until in the 1990's. Her awareness time span is, however, long due to the company's mail order catalogue. In her childhood she had the 'hobby' to play a game in which she in her imagination could buy something from each and every page. The company as such remained, however, unfamiliar to her, as her parents did not support bargain stores or retail cooperatives.

Among the middle-aged informants, long, approximately 35 - 40 years of awareness time spans depicted early eras in the company's history and were based on childhood memories:

“When we were children we got the mail order catalogue and my mother ordered cloths from there” (Sari, 41, I).

“Kalle Anttila was the founder of Anttila. Then he moved to Florida. He was too tanned for the time being. ....I know the catalogues. I used to look at them as a child and imagine what I would like to have if I could from each and every page.” (Kirsi, 48, I)

The oldest informants, Jorma (75, I) and Eine (65, I) had been aware of the company since it was founded and referred to the times when the company was founded and when they themselves were young adults:

“It started in the basement of Tennispalatsi, opposite my job” (Jorma, 76, I).



Jorma's and Eine's time spans range till the beginning of the company's history and are more than 50 years long. The oldest informants had personally experienced the early years of the company. They worked opposite the company's first department store and remembered the times well as part of their own lives as young adults. Anttila's history has become part of their own personal history as they in the 1960's used to pass over Anttila's catalogues to Russian locomotive engineers who then went shopping at Anttila.

In sum, only some of the young informants referred to quite recent eras in the company's history whereas the other young informants were aware of the company mainly since the 1990's but some had an awareness time span since the company's early years and new 'the whole history'. As earlier eras of the company's history live on also in the minds of the young consumers as learnt knowledge based on other people's experiences, age can not be regarded as an indicator of the awareness time span in this specific data set. Neither was there any regularity in how long back in time in the company's history the informants generally referred to.

An approximation of the informants' awareness time spans is given in Table 7.

**Table 7 Awareness time spans**

<b>Awareness time spans</b>	<b>Earliest experience mentioned / Illustrative quote</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Informant</b>
5 years	"It hasn't changed much"	Own adulthood experiences	Sanna, 21, I
5 years	Shopping experiences	Own adulthood experiences	Sanni, 25, A
5 years	"I visit it now and then"	Own adulthood experiences	Laura, 26, A
10 years	"My working place already for three years, I don't remember that much about the previous 10 years"	Own childhood experiences	Tuuli, 23, A
10 years	"First in the beginning Kodin Anttila felt too big, but now...."	Own adulthood experiences	Jutta, 31, A
15 years	"It was then at primary school"	Own childhood experiences	Eeva-Maria, 23, A
15 years	"It might have been the first one where they renewed the lighting so that....."	Own childhood experiences	Tanja, 28, A
15-20 years	"As a child I waited for Anttila's mail order catalogue"	Own childhood experiences	Johanna, 25, A
20 years	"Childhood memories!"	Own childhood experiences	Anne, 27, A
25 years	"In my childhood....."	Own childhood experiences	Oskar, 31, I
35 years	"When I was a child my mother...."	Own childhood experiences	Sari, 42, I
40 years	"You know, my father knew Kalle Anttila"	Own childhood experiences	Ilkka, 43, I
40 years	"When I was a child I thought ....."	Own childhood experiences	Maria, 44, I
40 – 50 years	"My fellow-student told me about the company and the founder..."	Learnt knowledge	Vaula, 47, I
40 – 45 years	"I used to look in their catalogue when I was a child..."	Own childhood experiences	Kirsi, 48, I
40- 50 years	"Kalle Anttila and the mail order company even sold...."	Own childhood experiences	Mikko, 48, I
40 - 50 years	"Kalle Anttila was in the 60's when my Granny bought...."	Own childhood experiences	Vepa, 49, I
50 years	"Anttila has been around since the 50's or 60's"	Learnt knowledge	Tero, 26, A
50 years	"Anttila has long traditions. It is an old store"	Learnt knowledge	Laura, 23, I
50 years	"Anttila is a department store, which position has been solid and stable for ages".	Learnt knowledge	Tony, 23, A
50 years	"Anttila is an old institution, started with the mail-order catalogues and out-of-them build a nation wide network of shops"	Learnt knowledge	Tiina, 23, A
< 50 years	"At those days the quality....."	Own adulthood experiences	Eine, 65, I
< 50 years	"Our office was opposite Kalle Anttila..."	Own adulthood experiences	Jorma, 76, I

The starting point of the awareness time span emerged based on the earliest company-related experience the informant mentioned. Awareness time spans ranged from 5 to 50 years and it was not possible based on this data set to determine any specific drivers for why certain experiences were recalled. Neither was any specific era in the company's history held in favor.

"It is surprising how many different things you associate with a company name, Furthermore, it's strange to notice they stem from so many years...small seemingly unimportant things can be the roots for significant thoughts" (Tiina, 23, LD).

"It is exciting how different things people pay attention to and remember" (Jutta, 31, LD).

When we discussed the accounts in the group interview I was surprised about how different things people remember of such a familiar shop and what they regard worth mentioning" Tanja, 28, LD).

However, a rich description of how the company has been experienced by the informants over the years emerged. Next, the end point of the awareness time span is discussed.

#### 4.2.1.2. *"Now" as the end point of the awareness time span*

In a strict sense, 'now,' the moment of the interview, written account or group interview specified the end point of the awareness time span for the informants in the context of this study. Informants also expressed future plans and expectations, but as the future is unseen for all, planned actions may or may not come true. Hence, the decision was made to specify the end point for the awareness time span on the moment for the data collection, although it is recognized that image constructions are continuous processes in which future expectations play a significant role. Expectations are rooted in previous experiences, out of which they emerge and live on in people's minds as promises for future experiences. Vepa (49, I), for example, expected the company to be cheap based on past experiences although he was a frequent customer at the company:

(Q) "Why do you expect it to be cheap?"

"It's because of this Anttila, what's his name, Kalle Anttila, and Kalle Anttila's mail-order company that used to be regarded as a cheap and easy way to buy things" (Vepa, 49, I).

Today he doesn't experience the company to be cheap, although he expects it to be that. This discrepancy frustrated him:

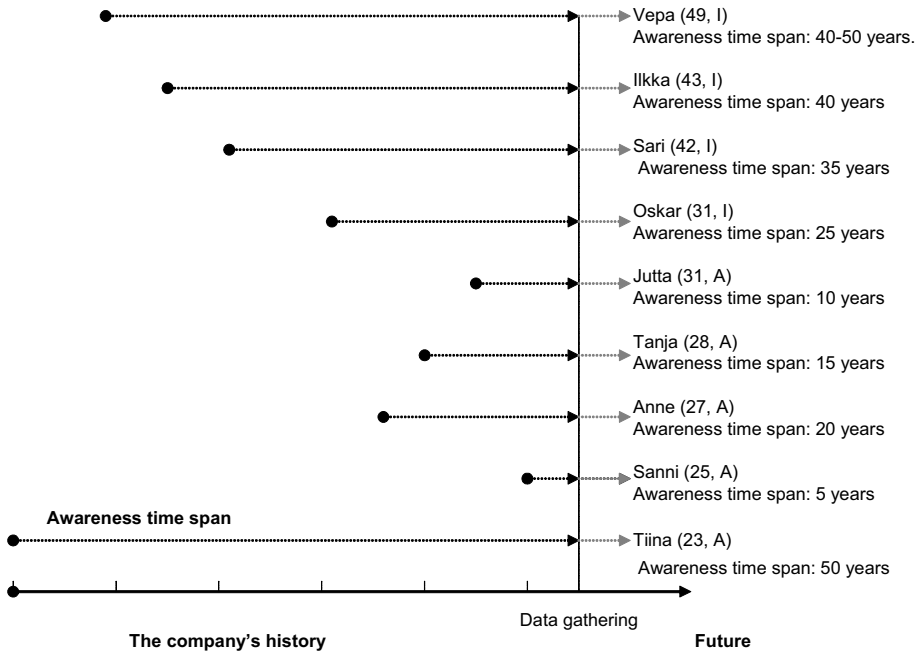
"I compare that I can get the same products cheaper elsewhere. If I compare with Maxi, you feel being betrayed at the checkout as the bill is so big" (Vepa, 49, I)

Future plans regarded often future shopping:

"At Anttila you will always find a father's days present and a Christmas present for daddy. If you can't think of any present, it's best to go to Anttila. Go always first to Anttila! Is this a slogan or did I just made it? It just came to my mind" (Johanna, 25, A).

However, the end point of the awareness time span was specified at the moment of the data gathering, as it was the point in time when the analyzed image constructions

emerged. Since the data collection, which also might have become a memorable company-related experience for the informants, the informants may have had many newer company-related experiences and new image constructions may have emerged. In Figure 24 an illustration of the variety of the awareness time spans is depicted.



**Figure 24** Awareness time spans

Next, the temporal focus for constructing images is discussed.

#### **4.2.2. Temporal focus for image constructions**

The informants' image constructions emerged to be temporally focused on a specific period of time during the informant's company-related awareness time span. The temporal focus depicts that specific period of time based on which the informant mainly constructs his/her image of the company today. The temporal focus in the past times means that company actions today are interpreted based on images the informant constructed, for example, in the 1960's, based on company actions in the 1960's or based on other sources from the 1960's. Hence, images today may be constructed based on more recent or past experiences way back in time, thus having a temporal 'jetlag.'

"It might be that I'm stuck to the old image of the company" (Maria, 44, I).

The temporal focus emerged in the data due to three reasons: (1) the informant did not realize being 'stuck to' old times, as Maria expressed herself, (2) the informant was

unwilling to up-date and change the temporal focus to more recent times, or (3) present experiences did not support a change in the temporal focus.

Mikko represents the second group as he was not interested in the company and in updating his images.

I don't have any other image than the old bargain store at Tennispalatsi. The original Anttila is not known among people from Helsinki for anything else than the cheap record store. And there is one also in Kodin Anttila these days. I don't think it could come to my mind to go and buy shoes from Anttila as it is a bargain store. My image originate from the mail order company and Kalle Anttila and he even sold anything really cheaply, mattresses and whatever (Mikko, 48, I).

Mikko experiences the company as it was in the 1960's or 1970's and is neither willing to visit the company nor follow company actions in order to change his images.

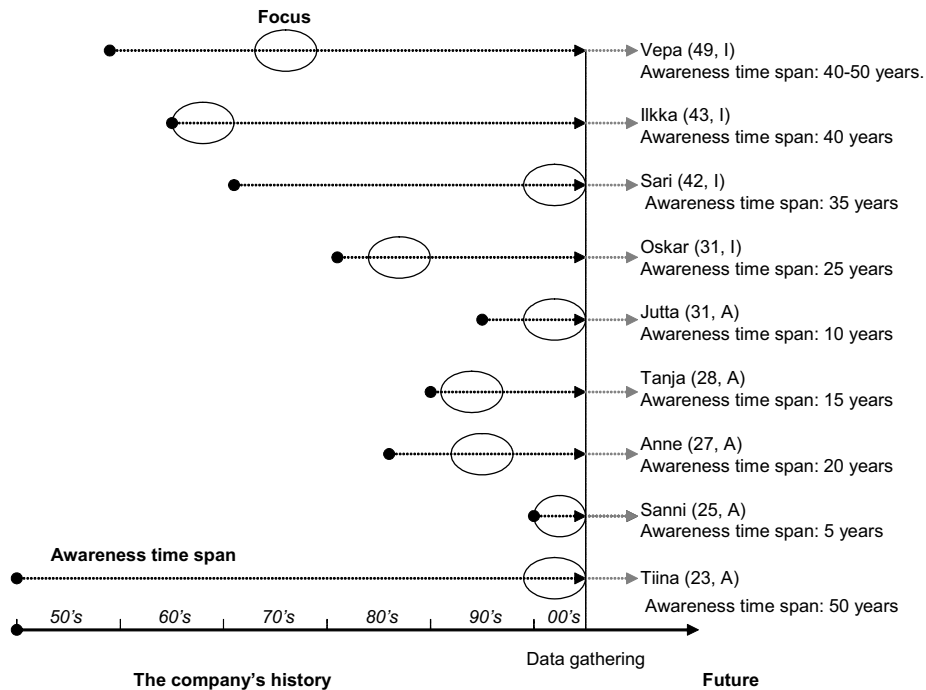
My image originates from the mail order company and Kalle Anttila, and he even sold anything that was cheap, mattresses and whatever. It all started from there, and grew, according to whatever that was cheap. It was the Anttila-theme and it has marked the company quite a lot (Mikko, 48, I).

The third (3) reason that emerged for being temporally focused in old times was that present experiences do not support a change in the temporal focus.

The images are the same as during Kalle Anttila's times, of course it has grown but the images are the same. The products are such that when you buy of good looking pare of shoes you will find out that your feet are sweating a lot in them. How can you make this kind of shoes – good looking shoes! (Vepa, 49, I)

Hence, not only images may originate from a long awareness time span, also the main focus for interpreting company actions today may be in the past.

Next, an illustration of emerged temporal foci for image constructions is presented in Figure 25.



**Figure 25 Temporal foci for image constructions**

One of the youngest informants, Tiina, has an awareness time span of more than 50 years, but her focus for interpreting company actions are in present time. She is an employee at Kesko<sup>37</sup>, which might have an influence on both her knowledge of the company's history as well as on her temporal focus. A similar structure, although not depicted in the Figure, is Jorma's, with an awareness time span for more than 50 years. He has up-dated his temporal focus to more recent times, partly because his daughter is employed at Anttila.

"Today Anttila does not have the same kind of sensitivity. It belongs to Kesko, which means expensive" (Jorma, 76, I).

In conclusion, age did not emerge as an indicator of the time span or the main temporal focus for interpreting company actions today.

In general, the informants expressed quite clearly their temporal focus. However, some informants expressed multiple temporal foci and some were undecided on their focus. Next, single versus multiple temporal foci will be discussed.

<sup>37</sup> Kesko is the owner of Anttila

#### 4.2.2.1. *Single versus multiple temporal foci*

Multiplicity in image constructions emerged based on the temporal dimension in the image constructions, but also multiple images of the different department stores, location of the department stores, sections within the department stores, product groups and product brands. Some informants' multiple images were based on multiple temporal foci in the image constructions. First, separated image constructions within the company is discussed, and then singular versus multiple temporal foci.

Only some informants constructed unified images of the whole company with a temporal focus in quite recent times.

Red color and the logo. Quite well-known, plastic bags, the logo quite well displayed, a little bit like, you know, middle-class (Sanna, 21, I).

Tony and Tiina expressed the most salient way of distinguishing between the department stores and within the departments:

There are two versions of Anttila: Kodin Ykkönen and basic Anttila...Net Anttila is a pioneer in internet shopping. (Tony, 23, A); Anttila has excellent sections for music and household appliance. I guess most Finns buy their records from Anttila's Top Ten [the section for music]. (Tiina, 23, A).

A separation on product level emerged and frequently resulted in contradictory image constructions. Some products were experienced as having bad quality, some average, and some as well-known high quality brands.

Not trendy, no fashion, basic things. Tutta! Surprise! Also Esprit on the children's section. But, in line with the brand, they are more expensive, not average priced, as other children's wear in general (Anne, 27, A).

The products are usually cheap or reasonably priced. There are only some expensive luxurious products but they cover well well-known brands: Adidas, Nike, Levis, HP, Canon, Philips, etc. (Tero, 28, A).

Separated images emerged based on comparison of location of the department stores in Finland.

Anttila in Lappeenranta is great, the one opposite Helsinki railway station is miserable and small, and they don't have all the sections. From Anttila in Kaisaniemi you'll find a lot of small nice things to your home and kitchen (Johanna, 25, A).

The section for food in Tampere is one of the best in town! (Tanja, 28, A)

Contradictory images emerged frequently of the different department stores and in some accounts they were expressed almost as opposites.

I don't have any other image than the old bargain store in Tennispalatsi... Kodin Anttila: Positive, good value for money, quality not so good – it's up to what you buy but good selection, easy to access, neat, modern, and quite positive...They both have their own identities (Mikko, 48, I).

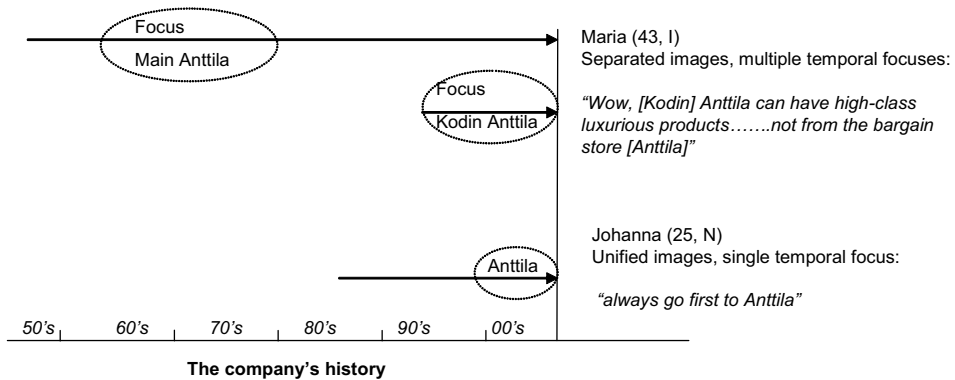
Additionally, some informants were undecided on how they think about the company.

I'm aware of that the image I tried to depict is true, but now and then the image is more positive and I can even stop for shopping there (Eva-Maria, 23, LD).

Multiple temporal foci emerged to be based on separated image constructions within the company. For example, if the main Anttila was distinguished from Kodin Ykkönen, then also the temporal focus for image constructions was distinguished between the department stores.

Anttila reminds me basically of Kalle Anttila...today it [Anttila] reminds me more of Kesko (Jorma, 76, I).

In the data set, multiple temporal foci due to different departments or sections of the company were, however, diversified from each other. Next, in Figure 26 an illustration of unified versus diversified image construction based on different temporal foci is depicted.



**Figure 26 Single versus multiple temporal foci**

In sum, the informants constructed a network of images over time, distinguishing between the company's locations, departments, sections, products and product brands. Contradictory images emerged as not all levels or reference points were experienced in the same way. Multiple temporal foci and separation between them emerged based on what department, section or product group the informant referred to.

Next, the content of the awareness time span, namely, the network of images informants had constructed during their awareness time span is discussed.



#### 4.2.3. *Content of image constructions over time*

The content of the informants' image constructions depicts *what* company-related experiences the informant refers to *over time*. The image constructions today emerged to be due to four forces: (1) what experiences the informants keep memorable, (2) from which sources are these experiences, and (3) the perspectives for image construction, and (4) the emotions involved and appraised by the company. In this section, these elements will be discussed, together with the informants' view of the company's history until today, as it is experienced and remembered by the informants.

Next, the content, emerging from past experiences from various sources, based on chosen perspectives, and mixed with emotions over time, are discussed.

##### 4.2.3.1. *Consumers narrating the past*

While reflecting upon the company, the informants simultaneously depicted 'the consumers' view' of the company's history until today as it is remembered by the informants today. Besides reflecting on the company, informants narrated happenings in their own and other peoples' lives as well as past times in general.

The case company Anttila was founded more than 50 years ago. The informants' experiences span from the very beginning of the company's history. The main themes that emerged were (1) the founder of the company, Kalle Anttila, (2) Anttila as the first mail order company in Finland, and (3) own memories in relation to the company. Next, an overview of the company's history seen 'through the eyes of the consumer' is presented.

Some informants referred back in time until the very beginning of the company's history and mentioned especially Kalle Anttila, the founder and owner of the company until 1976. In post war Finland, rebuilding the country was the theme and main task for everyone. Entrepreneurs providing the country with reasonably priced products through mail order were pioneers in the field.

When thinking of Anttila, my first association is Kalle Anttila, I mean, once upon a time you could get almost anything through Anttila's mail order - I think it was the first one in Finland. Kalle Anttila was a pioneer of his time. It started from the basement at Tennispalatsi, opposite my job...he brought a lot of people by buss to do shopping. Anttila used to be so popular that Russian locomotive engineers came via us, we gave them old brochures and they continued to Anttila (Jorma, 75, I).

Kalle Anttila's prominent position in the society from the 1950's to the 1980's, as well as his personal history, and even the way he looked emerged as memorable themes for the informants.

One of my primary thoughts is Kalle Anttila, he was a rich man, that was how I thought of him as a child...then he moved to Florida (Maria, 44, I).

He was the Veljekset Keskinen<sup>38</sup> of those times. Became rich and moved to West Palm Beach. He had a huge house there (Ilkka, 44, I).

The first thing that comes to my mind is Kalle Anttila...Kalle Anttila was the founder of Anttila. Somehow it was the first thing that came to my mind. Then he went to Florida. He was too tanned at those day...It's funny that I remember Kalle Anttila because there's nothing cheap about him. He was a success even though he went bankrupt. Like Keihänen<sup>39</sup>! There are those businessmen who became rich. He doesn't have the reputation of a 'cheap jack.' The bankruptcy was in the beginning of the 80's (Kirsi, 48, I).

Some referred to the products the company sold, although all informants did not appreciate the quality of the products:

Kalle Anttila's mail order, which was thought as a cheap and easy way to buy things....Kalle Anttila was in the 60's. My Granny bought a pullover from there, that's from where I remember it, and it sold mattresses and that's from where it grew. People from the countryside used it and that's probably why it was a success. Kalle himself left to America (Vepa, 49, I).

"Kalle Anttila sold cheap mattresses and what ever that was cheap. That's how it grew (Mikko, 48, I).

Then the quality was bad and the shop was a mess but now everything has completely changed. It was awful at Kalle Anttila's times, [they sold] rubbish (Eine, 65, I).

Not only older and middle-aged informants mentioned the company's earliest times, also some of the youngest informants were well-informed about the company's history and from where it had started and developed.

Anttila is an old institution, started with the mail order catalogues and a nation-wide network of shops stemming from them (Tiina, 23, A).

Anttila is a department store, which position has been solid and stable for ages (Tony, 23, A).

If I have understood right, Anttila has been around since the 50's or 60's so the company is well known already based on its long age. Another thing that comes to my mind about Anttila is the mail order catalogue. The catalogue came in my childhood to my parents (Tero, 26, A).

I associate with long traditions, as Anttila has been on the market for long (Laura, 23, A).

Some of the informants had close personal experiences with the company for a long period of time (Jorma 76, I and Eine 65, I) and other informants referred to other peoples' relationships:

My father knew Kalle Anttila (Ilkka, 43, I).

Some informants had memories in which Anttila played an important role and referred to experiences from their childhood:

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<sup>38</sup> "Veljekset Keskinen Ltd. is the biggest village shop in Finland which at the same time is also the second biggest department store here. It is a family-owned business and a unique tourist attraction in the whole world. And all this in a small village with only 500 inhabitants!" (5.4.2006/ <http://www.tuuri.fi/englanti.html>)

<sup>39</sup> Keihänen was a businessman in the early 70's. His wealth made him a celebrity in those days. His company went bankrupt in 1974.

Memories from my childhood! Sausage and French fries at the top floor of Anttila! First on a Saturday shopping tour and then with the whole family to eat delicatessens: who would like to switch these soft French fries to harder ones? © (Anne, 27, A).

However, the younger informants gave a more general overview of the company's earliest times and did not refer to the founder or to specific product groups the company sold. Kalle Anttila was also unknown to some of the younger informants (20 – 30 years old). On the other hand, Tony had become inspired to know more about the company after having participated in written accounts on the company (2<sup>nd</sup> phase of data collection), and had looked for more information about the company on the internet:

I checked the Internet about the founder and the history of the company, but I didn't know about it beforehand (Tony, 23, GI).

He depicts how the content based on which images are constructed can be enhanced and up-dated through new knowledge when the consumer becomes inspired to focus on the company.

### **Anttila during the 1990's**

When the youngest informants refer to their early childhood describing their earliest experiences, they in fact refer to the 1990's in the company's history:

Diaries, calendars, Winnie the Pooh penholders, perfumed rubbers, sharpeners and memo-books. When the things were more important than life itself. And they had to be from Tiimari or Anttila, otherwise one was "out". Lucky enough it was then, at primary school (Eeva-Maria, 23, A).

The informant attended primary school 13-16 years ago, so the events she refers to are from the beginning of the 1990's in the company's history. Tiina refers to the same period of time in her fond memories from her childhood

My earliest associations of Anttila are from my childhood. I visited Anttila with my mother and the shop was in two floors. As a small child I especially liked the escalators, which were rare in a small city like Kajaani. Already at that time we bought sewing things and yarn from there and went to look for new curtain cloths. We did not buy cloth from there, they were not such good quality and the selection was not as broad as nowadays. The toy department was exciting and I would have liked to spend more time there (Tiina, 23, A).

### **Anttila during the 00's**

Most informants who described more recent times in the company's history referred to the products the company sells, the price level, location of the department stores, colors representing the company, the interior in the department stores, and the level of service in the department stores.

Some informants expressed memories from quite recent times. Vaula was very satisfied with the company and eager to express her satisfaction.

Last summer I was so satisfied with Anttila. I wanted to buy a hammock, a genuine hammock. I went to Kodin Anttila and was so satisfied as it was so reasonably priced. I had called a hammock-shop and they said that they cost about 100e. When I went to Kodin Anttila, it was only 16,95e, exactly the same big-sized hammock. I noted that. Yes! Anttila is a very

reasonably priced store and has a good selection. I was very pleased with Anttila. These kinds of small experiences stick into one's mind! (Vaula, 47, I)

The young informants gave an overall and general picture of how they experienced the company. As Anttila is a department store, the informants mentioned a broad variety of products specifying what they pay attention to in relation to the company. A few examples are given:

Broad selection of products, reasonable prices, not so high quality, situated in various parts of Finland (Laura, 26, I).

Secure, domestic, big, old, trustworthy, red, green and white. Average priced, average quality, average in all ways. Average selection, you don't find anything special, only little service personnel. Porcelain and home equipment, always something for Christmas! Tablecloths. Never suitable children's shoes or outdoor wear! Exhausting! (Anne, 27, A)

The first thing that comes to my mind is a big department store from where you can buy almost anything ranging from cloth to domestic appliances...you can find the department store in almost every city. Then comes to my mind the red color, most likely from the logo (Laura, 23, A).

Cheap unstylish cloths, awful colors, the catalogue which is almost as awful as the one from Halonen<sup>40</sup>. Strange pictures, everything looks bizarre. White cold background! Anyway, some change towards the better can be noticed. Something, but I can't say what. Christmas and piles of catalogues, directly from the mailbox to the bin. A lot of sections, a lot of things, a lot of everything (Eeva-Maria, 23, A).

Anttila has two different chains, Kodin Anttila and Anttila department stores. Anttila belongs to Kesko. From Kodin Anttila you can buy different kind of things ranging from flowers and washing machines to hammers and toilet seats. In the department store you can't find those biggest things, although there too, there is a big selection of things. The price level is moderate; it is not a budget store but not exclusively priced either. Because they have a lot of things, you will find what you look for. I would even say that within the price level I can afford, the selection is excellent (Jutta, 31, A).

Some informants characterized the company based on the clientele that visit the company frequently. As was mentioned earlier, some informants did not experience Anttila to be for city-people (Mikko (48, I).

Anttila is for everyone, located in towns and villages, central marketplaces (Tanja, 28, A).

For sure every Finn has visited Anttila or at least heard about it. I think Anttila is for families where you can get everything you need at one time. The section for clothes is also directed more to families, I don't think young people can get almost anything there. Not at least what's in fashion (Laura, 23, A).

It is a store for ordinary people, where you can go in a jogging suit, meaning, you don't have to care how you look, like for example, when you go to Stocka<sup>41</sup>. (Jutta, 31, A).

The products are mainly for the average consumer, in other words, for the "windbreaker folks" (Tero, 26, A).

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<sup>40</sup> Halonen is a shop for clothes

<sup>41</sup> Stokka is a nickname for Stockmann, the biggest and most exclusive department store in Finland

For the whole family, cheap and quite versatile. People go to Anttila to buy the necessary things (Sanni, 25, A).

Old ladies with their bags and sachets (Anne, 27, A).

For older people, for those who run after offers. NetAnttila, Kesko's Internet store, I think it's mostly the frequent customers who go there (Anne, 27, A).

Grannies. On the other hand, Anttila probably offers Finns exactly what we consume. Otherwise, it wouldn't breathe. And you can get outdoor wear "windbreakers" that couples use. Cheaply (Eeva-Maria, 23, A).

A shopping place for older people, outside cities, not in the center of towns (Anne, 27, A).

Grannies! No one admits buying anything from Kerava Anttila, I mean no one who lives inside Ring road III. All the others announce fine things and clothes and presents, which they have again found in Anttila (Eva-Maaria, 23, A).

Mass fashion to the countryside (Sanni, 25, A).

The interior of the department stores and sections within the stores emerged as a very significant part of how the company was experienced. Comparison emerged as a way to specify one's view of the company.

Anttila in Lappeenranta is great; the one opposite the railway station in Helsinki is gloomy (Johanna, 25, A).

In Tampere the department store is a lot wider, it's higher and the lighting is better (Tanja, 28, A).

OK, the one in the Granite House is the worst example. On the escalator walls there are the world's most awful and old-fashioned copper coloured mirrors. The space is narrow and the spot is blinding. It is stuffy and foggy there, always dog weather inside. The department store in Tampere is enormously wider and spacious and the lighting is better. Then there is also Kodin Ykkönen...The department in Kaisaniemi is totally from another world and if I have understood right, they want to attract a more sophisticated clientele than Anttila's main stores. In Kaisaniemi the section for glassware by the entrance always looks good and so are the windows (Tanja, 28, A).

The interior supports the feeling of average and so do the colours. They are not aiming at an elitist impression, but it's not a bargain store design either (Anne, 27, A).

The Anttila shops are messy, which adds to the image of cheap and maybe also low quality. It has a stuffy image...You don't enjoy shopping. Grey entrance, where green and red and white signs guide you where to find what (Eeva-Maria, 23, A).

The display in the shops is well-planned and the products are well-displayed. Especially in Kodin Ykkönen. For example, the section for gardening is really inviting and the products are displayed in well-planned, authentic surroundings. The sections are well separated, e.g., Top Ten can immediately be associated as the centre for entertainment electronics and it is easy to find (Tony, 23, A).

Identity symbols were mentioned as identification of the company. Red and white were the most frequently mentioned colors informants connected to the company, but some added green as a color for identifying the company.

Red and green and white (Anne, 27, A).

Anttila's logo has probably been the same throughout the times. Quite everlasting logo, although the colors could be better (Tero, 26, A).

The personnel and their dresses were mentioned in some accounts

I associate immediately to the sales personnel's outfits. They are worse than Stokka's cucumber-dresses (Tanja, 28, A).

The sales personnel are dressed in surgery green and red. Involuntarily put on. In front, name and position. Not so high (Eeva-Maria, 23, A).

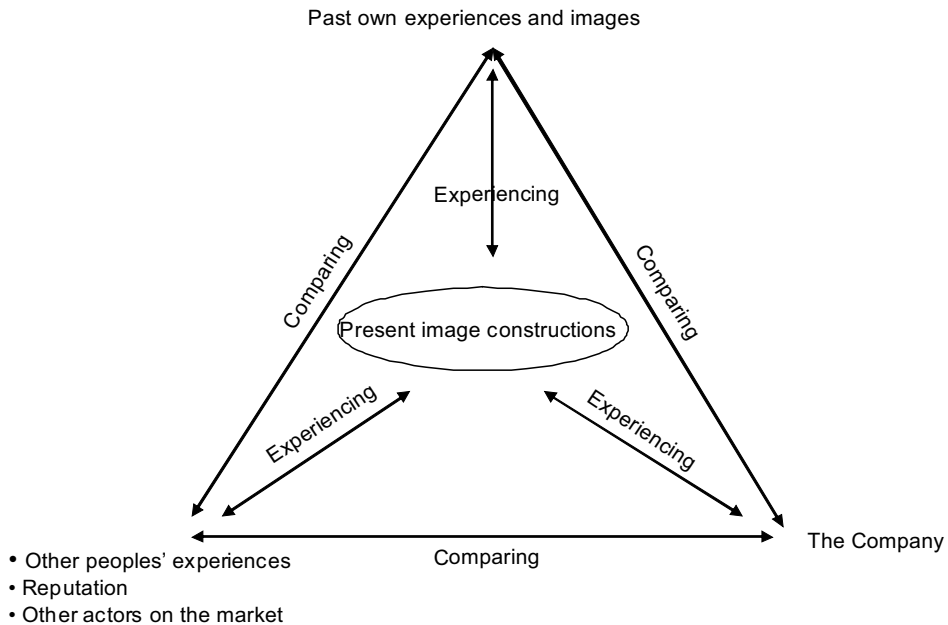
In conclusion, the content depicts what the informant has paid attention to over the years during her/his awareness time span and recollections.

In general, informants with a long awareness time span emphasized their own experiences and memories of the company prior to reflecting on the company or its actions. Moreover, these informants narrated their memories and views of the company, whereas those informants with a short awareness time span emphasized reflections on the company through product selection, the clientele, and the interior in the shops. Other elements mentioned were the logo, the uniforms of the personnel, and the level of service. These differences may also be due to different data collection methods as the majority of the younger informants wrote accounts or were group interviewed, whereas others were interviewed individually.

Next, the sources for company-related experiences will be discussed, which can become the basis for image constructions today.

#### *4.2.3.2. Sources for image constructions over time*

The pre-understanding in the open phase of the study revealed three sources for earlier company-related experiences based on which images were constructed today (1) one's own company-related experiences and interpretations, (2) the company's self-expression, and (3) reputation or other peoples' experiences and interpretations of the company and/or other actors on the market in relation to the case company. The overall generalization of the sources for image constructions today is depicted in Figure 27.



**Figure 27 Sources for image constructions**

Based on the whole data set, no new sources emerged. Reputation, however, was mentioned more frequently, although it did not emerge as an important or overriding source for the present image construction. The crucial point was how the informant him-/herself had experienced the company.

## Reputation

Reputation and other peoples' opinions and experiences emerged as one source for comparison when constructing images. As reputation is in this study is defined as "the collective representation of a firm's past actions," reputation can be regarded as a collective memory shared among people.

The reputation of a bargain store will stay forever (Tanja, 28, A).

It's said now-days that there is no need for men's magazines. It is enough when you get the Anttila's mail order catalogue with the underwear pages (Tony, 23, A).

The clothes from Anttila had a bad reputation ten years ago. The clothes were of bad quality and out of shape and awful texture granny-clothes...Anttila is still considered a cheap store, where it is a bit embarrassing to buy clothes. The truth is, however, that we all go to Anttila as you can get almost anything there and the store is everywhere (Tiina, 23,N).

Tuuli, an employee at Anttila, expresses her concern of the company's reputation.

Anyway, I came to the conclusion that Anttila has a very bad reputation these days and it can take years to change. I also believe that no other student noticed that it has changed to having a much better product assortment and better department store, because I think these changes do not reveal themselves to customers, they only show themselves to employees in changes in the routines. Somehow it is sad that many of our young employers are ashamed to tell that they work for Anttila. That is a thing that should be changed (Tuuli, 23, LD).

Although reputation emerged as an element in many accounts, the informants made a clear distinction between their own experiences and the general reputation. Reputation emerged rather as collective memory and as one element in the image constructions. Reputation was not either required as a foremost hinder for shopping at Anttila, when other reasons favored shopping. In fact, all informants had shopping experiences from the department store despite of how they experienced the company.

#### *4.2.3.3. Perspectives for image constructions*

Although all informants had shopping experiences at Anttila, the perspective for their image constructions differed. Most of the informants reflected on the company from a customer's perspective, some focusing from a utilitarian perspective, whereas some reflected from an employee's, relative of an employee's or from a professional perspective of the company. The amount of perspectives one informant reflected from varied from one to multiple. Those reflecting from multiple perspectives separated the perspectives in their expressions.

Yes we are customers, our daughter works there! (and later in the interview) at this age the crucial thing is from where you can find a parking place (Jorma, 75, I).

A temporal dimension emerged based on when the perspective had been taken, changed to another, or when multiple perspectives had been taken.

#### **The perspective of an employee**

Two informants were employed by the company and looked at it accordingly:

I associate with other employees and mainly to what the company is like as an employer than as a shopping place as it is such a long time since I was a customer at Anttila...Altogether a good place to work. I associate mainly with the shop. I work in and my colleagues and my boss with whom I get along well. A very relaxing and nice atmosphere, at least among colleagues! (Tuuli, 23, A and LD)

#### **The relative of an employee**

Two informants were relatives of an employee. The other informant, Jorma (see above) distinguished between the perspectives and thus had multiple perspectives on the company, but the other had changed her perspective from a customer's perspective to a 'relative of an employee's -perspective.' The change had also influenced how she looked upon the company.

I have nothing bad to say about the company, nothing at all (Eine, 65, I).



She remembered the old times at Anttila, but emphasized that now everything has totally changed during Kesko's times.

I have a good image, maybe it is affected by this connection. You know, my daughter works there (Eine, 65, I).

### **Professional perspective**

Two informants expressed a perspective in relation to their own profession:

I have interfered with their advertising (Vepa, 49, I, lawyer).

Jorma, who is a retired entrepreneur said:

When you move from a family-owned company to the present system [owned by a trading company] the change is necessary; you can't be a pioneer for long...today the company doesn't have that same sensitivity that it had at Kalle Anttila's times (Jorma, 75, I).

### **Utilitarian perspective**

Most of the informants reflected on the company based on a utilitarian perspective, expressing themselves in terms of what the company can offer them:

You can get anything from Anttila! is evidently the image that first comes to my mind. Quality is also a thing that I associate with the Anttila brand (Tony, 23, A).

Hence, the utilitarian perspective emerged as the most salient way of looking at the company, despite whether the informant regarded him-/herself as a customer or not<sup>42</sup>. The utilitarian perspective emerged in expressions of what the informants experienced the company could provide him/her with, and how the company satisfied the informant's needs.

The foremost reason why I buy so much from Anttila is that I've been working for Kesko and I still have a staff card, with which I get a reduction at the shop. For a student, who buys a lot of music and records, a small reduction turns into a lot of money quite quickly (Tiina, 23, A).

Anttila is a department store for homes. There you can get records, some sports equipment, some clothes (Vaula, 47, I).

You can find cheap household appliances (Sanni, 25, A).

From Anttila you get cheap household appliance and plus points (Johanna, 25, A); [concerning Anttila] I especially associate with the music and games section in Anttila as I use it most. There you can always find the latest ones but also specialties, at a regular price and sometimes they even have good offers (Laura, 23, A).

I buy bulbs there with a 50% reduction. Because I'm always late with planting and it is so convenient to buy them at Anttila with a 50% reduction. What is important with Anttila is that it is easy to go there, as you know in advance what they sell. The selection is not too big. If I go to Stockmann to buy a lamp it takes me 1½ hours just looking at the lamps. If I go to Anttila it takes me 5 minutes and I'm out. They have their own selection and, Ok, that's the lamp and it's quickly bought. Basic things, easy to buy, reasonable prices, reliable quality! (Vaula, 47, I).

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<sup>42</sup> Findings in Magnus Söderlund's research (2006) suggest that the most joyful shopping experience is the one, when you find something good at a cheap price.

In general, what counted most for the informants was that Anttila at the right moment suited their needs, whether it was the location, the price level, the selection of products, the plus points they offered or something else of need, the decision to go to Anttila or to buy from there, was categorized in the utilitarian perspective, despite that some informants did not identify with the company.

### **Perspectives taken and the temporal dimension**

A temporal dimension emerged as the original perspective taken in the beginning. The awareness time span could be enriched with new perspectives resulting in a multiplicity of perspectives (Jorma's 76, I; Vepa, 49, I), or changed to another perspective (Eine, 65, I; Tuuli, 23, A and LD).

**In sum**, the perspective/s informants used for image constructions appear to influence *what* the informant paid attention to regarding the company or had earlier paid attention to. The perspective did not, however, explain feelings or emotions expressed by the informants. Next, feelings and emotions that emerged will be discussed.

#### *4.2.3.4. Feelings and emotions over time*

Feelings and emotions towards the company emerged in the data. The feeling discussed here is the feeling of distance or closeness to the company, yet the spectrum of emotions is more numerous.

In all accounts a feeling of distance towards the company emerged concerning how the informants expressed themselves in relation to the company. Moreover, the informants' company-related experiences over the years were both positive and negative emotions. Hence, informants who had positive emotions as well as those having negative emotions towards the company were represented among the informants. The positive emotions ranged from joy and excitement to positive surprise, whereas the negative emotions ranged from unfairness, dissatisfaction and frustration to boredom. Some informants expressed ambivalent, mixed emotions. Emotions over time emerged either as a continuum when the informant's emotions, positive or negative, remained the same, or mixed, when a change from one valor to another occurred based on the experiences during the time span.

### **Distance as a feeling towards the company over time**

For some informants the company is quite a distant actor on the marketplace, which they expressed through indifference and through a feeling that the company is not 'for them.' Other informants expressed a closeness or concern in relation to the company. The feeling of closeness changed slowly over the years among the informants.

Some informants expressed **indifference** towards the company or the feeling that the company is not 'for them,' hence, distancing the company in their expressions. Typically, these informants described the company quite shortly and in general terms.

Anttila, red color and the logo. Quite well known, plastic bags, the logo well displayed, the image compared with Stockmann not so high. There is a little bit like, how would I express it, average (Q) Do you go there? (I) "Rarely" (Sanna, 21, I).

Distancing emerged also when the company was experienced as a distant, but good, choice for secondary purposes.

Nothing comes to my mind, I don't really know. I associate to the shop in Kaisaniemi<sup>43</sup>, well, interior things. A bit old fashioned service. A bit like Aktia<sup>44</sup>, they also have old ladies at the cash-points, a bit the same at Anttila, old-maidish. Then comes to my mind that it has been something earlier but now it's not genuine (Oskar, 31, I).

However, later in the interview Oskar says:

The only time I go to Anttila, well we have bought plastic boxes there, the kind you can put under your bed. It comes to my mind that you can get basic things there. A plastic box doesn't have to be beautiful but practical. Then we bought mattresses for the country house. It was an impulse buy. We bought beds and mattresses. We wanted good quality and we think we found it there. Anyhow, I think that if we were to buy beds for our home, we wouldn't go there but for the country house it suits well (Oskar, 31, I).

In Kirsi's childhood, cooperatives represented something that was not supported by her family. Still today Kirsi feels that the company is not for her and that she has not visited the company. Later in the interview she remembers, however, a few occasions when she has been shopping at Anttila, but for other people, due to the benefits of gaining customer loyalty points from Anttila. Her feeling of distance has stayed the same over the years although she has started to do some shopping at the company.

I have, after all, been to Kodin Anttila by the Ring III, the bigger place, where I bought mattresses for the country house. I called a few places, it was to my husband's family's place and then Anttila was the choice as I got plus points from there...I don't think I would buy anything to our house there. The time I buy towels I don't buy them at Anttila (Kirsi, 48, I).

Expressing dislike or indifference towards the company did not mean, however, not being an occasional customer if the company provided something needed. Despite being indifferent to the company on a general level, some product groups or sections in the store might appear as not that distant as the whole company, as depicted in the next accounts:

Maybe it's cruel, but Anttila doesn't interest me. There's nothing that would attract me and their selection doesn't interest me. Even the name depicts something average and genuine Finnish. I'm not familiar with Net-Anttila. I think it is orange. I don't feel I need it [Net-Anttila] as "emergence-Anttila" is close from everywhere or then the product I need is replaceable with something you can buy elsewhere...[later in the account]...Anttila's food department is one of the best in Tampere<sup>45</sup> at least when speaking of fresh food. Graniittitalo might be the only department store in the center of Helsinki where you can get yarn. They are quite good ones. The department for music in the city center works well. The quality within the field doesn't really differ so it's worthwhile to buy them there, a little bit cheaper than from other similar stores. (Tanja, 28, A).

I myself buy music and movies at Anttila and I buy sheets for me at Anttila's Basic collection (Tiina, 23, A).

<sup>43</sup> Kaisaniemi is a district in Helsinki

<sup>44</sup> Aktia is a bank in Finland

<sup>45</sup> Tampere is a city in Finland. Anttila does not any longer have food departments. The one the informant refers to is a privately owned food shop situated in the basement of the department store.

Distancing the company and expressing indifference emerged as a way to express that the consumer did not identify with the company, although on a practical level, the company could be seen as a provider of goods and services also among these informants when convenient.

### **Involvement and concern**

A feeling of closeness and identification with the company emerged among those informants who experienced the company to be very suitable for their needs.

Because they have a lot of things, you will find what you look for. I would even say that within the price level I can afford, the selection is excellent (Jutta, 31, A).

Even informants who did not experience the feeling of closeness towards the company could express a concern for the company.

I'm not a frequent customer at Anttila but due to its good location in the centre I often buy film and batteries for my camera there. I also consider some Anttila's departments for toys well stocked and I have bought Christmas presents there for my relatives' kids (Tero, 26, A).

Later in the interview Tero is puzzled and concerned by the company's corporate identity:

What image is the company striving for? (Tero, 26, A)

Closeness towards the company emerged when the informants experienced that he/she could identify with the company as its offerings suited the informant's needs. Closeness and caring for the company emerged among all informants employed by the company, but also other informants expressed concern through their puzzlement with the company's targeted corporate identity.

### **Changes in mental distance towards the company over time**

Changes in the mental distance towards the company emerged mainly due to changes in the informant's life.

A slow change in the distance based on 'growing up' was depicted in Eeva-Maria's account. She expressed closeness during her childhood, but indifference and long distance when talking about the present.

Diaries, calendars, Winnie the Pooh penholders, perfumed rubbers, sharpeners and memo-books. When the things were more important than life itself. And they had to be from Tiimari or Anttila, otherwise one was 'out.' Lucky enough it was then, at primary school (Eeva-Maria, 23, A).

Maria's distance had changed due to new situations in life. She expressed feelings of closeness in past times when her children were small, but nowadays the distance is longer. She doesn't anymore follow their advertising and doesn't 'know anything about the company anymore.' Maria is interested in decorating her home. She is not that interested in shopping at Kodin Anttila or Anttila.

I remember when the kids were small and I went to Anttila for shopping. Even though I hated their advertisements that came in the mail, where ground meat was photographed in an ugly way, I think it was disgusting, I went there as I could get clothes and everything needed for our every day life at the same place. In the end I also bought food at Anttila...[later in the interview] then came Kodin Anttila, which was a tourist attraction. I was at home with the kids and it was a good destination to walk there, it was some 3-4 kilometers, it was quite new, they had a café and playground for kids. It was a happening to go there, have a cup of coffee and meet with some other mothers...[later in the interview] Today it's more like, well, I don't know if I anymore want to go there for shopping (Maria, 44, I).

A sudden change of distance towards the company due to one specific occasion was expressed by Mikko. Mikko's distance towards the company has always been long, but his first experience of Kodin Anttila discussed earlier, changed his long distance towards a closer one, but only concerning the department for home decoration, which came to represent the company for him after the occasion.

For me today, Anttila means Kodin Anttila (Mikko, 48, I).

In sum, the feeling of closeness emerged often as a feeling of concern for the company, whereas long mental distance emerged as indifference towards the company. Informants expressing a change in the feeling of distance during the awareness time span emerged as being either slow changes when, for example, new circumstances or periods in life emerged. However, based on this data set, it emerged that the feeling of distance towards the company did not change easily or it changed slowly. The informant who expressed a sudden change also changed his focus toward the company to another department store, which was new to him.

### **Positive emotions**

The company raised in some informants very positive emotions. The positive emotions expressed were security, joy, excitement, positive surprise, and satisfaction. These informants were satisfied with the company, but only some of them experienced the feeling of closeness towards the company, being frequent customers, whereas others, despite their positive emotions, did not visit the company often.

Joy, excitement and satisfaction were expressed by Vaula:

I was very satisfied with Anttila last summer when I wanted to buy a hammock, a real big hammock. Downtown they were about 100 euros but when I went to Kodin Anttila I was really satisfied as it was at such a reasonable price. The same kind, a big one for 16, 95 euros! (Vaula, 48, I).

Being satisfied with the selection of products and the price level was expressed by Jutta:

Because they have a lot of things, you will find what you look for. I would even say that within the price level I can afford, the selection is excellent. Often you have to look for something special in many stores and then you finally find it in Anttila...It's nice to go there. It is nice to look at their catalogues, as there are always so many different things to look at. Sometimes I have also seen some TV-spots, but that feels somehow strange. Anttila also has mail order, which I'm not familiar with. Stuff, on the other hand, it's all the same where you've bought it, and if you get it cheap at Anttila, you can buy it and that's alright (Jutta, 31, A).

A secure feeling was expressed by Johanna:

Anttila's red logo is all the time in my mind. It is soft and red, familiar and gives a secure feeling (Johanna, 25, A).

In sum, in this data set positive emotions did not indicate being, or not being a customer or experiencing closeness towards the company.

### **Negative emotions**

The company raised in some informants negative emotions. These informants were frustrated, disappointed, they felt the company as being unfair, or they felt boredom in relation to the company. Negative emotions did not emerge as a hindrance of being a customer at Anttila. Eeva-Maria and Anne expressed frustration, but nevertheless, she did shop at Anttila now and then due to utilitarian reasons.

You get Tallinna-watches there. And a half-heart necklace, which you then force on your first boyfriend. Anttila's parking hall is always full. You get the feeling that for sure when I back from this parking place to left I will hit another car or that awful post. That hasn't happened, not in Anttila. The sections for bras! I have never found any there. My mother bought me ones. She might have thought that in doing so, she might get the boys to leave me in peace. Yes, but they were oversized. All DDD. And pale brown lace. Well, images altogether. And then. ...And due to cost efficiency all underpaid single parent sales personnel are left unemployed (Eeva-Maria, 23, A).

Never suitable children's shoes or outdoor wear! Exhausting! (Anne, 27, A)

However, some informant's negative emotions were the reason for not shopping at Anttila.

I'd rather shop elsewhere than at Anttila, as it feels better when you get your purchases in a not-so-cheap-looking bag and when the shops have a nicer interior than Anttilas usually have (Sanni, 25, A).

In sum, negative emotions did not emerge as a definite hindrance for shopping when other needs overruled the emotions.

### **Ambivalence in emotions**

Sari's childhood experiences involve negative emotions of severe disappointment, which she has not forgotten although she has been relatively satisfied with the company during more recent times. The ambivalence in emotions is present in her expressions.

When we were children we got the mail order catalogue and my mother had ordered clothes and we had to send them back, we had to give them back. I don't know who had ordered, they were the wrong size. This is it what comes to my mind!...Of course, it's a big disappointment when you get a new coat and then it is so big that it has to be sent back. You have to give up the wonderful dream that you get something. I have two bigger sisters whose clothes I inherited so it was luxurious to get my own winter coat and when it is the wrong size or too big...Anttila is not like a bargain store or Hobby Hall, it is better. But when I say to my friends that I go to Anttila it's a little bit like a fun thing: "You're going to buy a candelabra for your home" [expressed with irony]...But my experiences [as a customer] are as positive as from anywhere else, especially from Kodin Anttila. Somehow it has been positioned like Hobby Hall and junk things but when you go there it is fresh and good quality things, but between Stockmann and Anttila there is a clear difference: the old picture of the ordinary man going there (Sari, 41, I).

**In sum**, a wide spectrum of both positive and negative emotions, as well as a mixture of both, emerged in the data. Emotions did not emerge as an indicator of action in this specific data set, but emotions over time or changes of emotions emerged to have a temporal dimension, as can be seen in the emotions depicted by Sari in the previous account. The temporal dimension in emotions will be discussed next.

### **Emotions over time**

Some informants expressed stable emotions towards the company over time, whereas some informants' emotions had changed due to new experiences. Vaula (47, I) has always been a satisfied customer with the company during her 25 year long awareness time span and expresses a feeling of closeness towards the company. Mikko (48, I) expressed negative emotions and a feeling of long distance towards the main Anttila, but positive emotions and a feeling of closer distance towards Kodin Anttila due to a change. Maria (44, I) expressed a feeling of closeness and positive emotion towards the company in past times, whereas the present emotions are not that positive, and her feeling of distance has become longer. **In sum**, based on the data, both the feeling of distance towards the company as well as emotions emerged to be due to changes over time. However, in this data set, the feeling of distance or closeness was slower to change than emotions that were raised quite suddenly. Although the informants could recall emotions from earlier experiences, it was the feeling of closeness or distance towards the company that lasted in memory and became a kind of perspective towards the company.

#### *4.2.3.5. Summary on the content in image constructions*

The content of the informants' image constructions describes *what* company-related experiences the informants refer to *over time*. The content recalled by the informants emerged as the basis for the present image constructions. In sum, images were constructed based on past experiences from multiple sources, various perspectives, feelings and emotions over time. For the company, the content depicts the company's history as it is remembered and experienced with 'the eyes of the consumers,' from multiple perspectives revealing a network of images over time. Past times were present in the informants' reflections on the company and a new history emerges from their present experiences (Gummesson 2000). The narrated history revealed occasions and eras in the company's history that had become important for the informants in relation to the company.

Next, comparison as a way to depict, specify and construct corporate images is discussed.

#### **4.2.4. Comparing as a way to depict, specify and construct images**

Comparison emerged in all accounts as a way to depict, specify, and construct images. Through comparison, the informants specified the image constructions in relation to what they compared the company to.

Anttila (Home-Anttila) is quite like, well, there are a lot of the same elements as in Ikea<sup>46</sup>: Home furnishing (Mikko 48);.

Comparison is a way to judge and the judgment is dependent on what we compare the entity with (Ornstein, 1989). Comparison emerged (1) within the company among departments and (2) sections, as discussed in the pre-understanding of image constructions. Comparison emerged frequently with competitors (3):

I don't think Anttila will establish more shops in the city centre, where it competes with Sokos, Stockmann and the shopping malls Forum and Kluuvi (Tero, 26, A).

Comparison emerged as a way to evaluate the company in general with the main bigger shopping places in the center of Helsinki.

There is quite a difference in the image if you compare Anttila with Stockmann<sup>47</sup> and even Sokos<sup>48</sup> stands for a higher quality (Vepa, 49, I).

Kodin-Anttila has a good image. Good selection, for upper middle-class people, not Skanno<sup>49</sup> but upper middle-class (Ilkka 44, I).

Some informants characterized the company through comparison with a branch (4) the informants identify as coming close to Anttila:

I know I can get it cheaper elsewhere, from Hongkong<sup>50</sup>. In Tarjoustalo<sup>51</sup> certain products are good and cheaper (Vepa, 49, I).

Moreover, comparison emerged based on the product and price level on the market (5):

Kodin Anttila has a better image [than Anttila], better quality and more fashionable. They've made efforts with the home decoration products, they compete with Ikea, and they're a bit more expensive than Ikea (Sanni, 25, A).

Comparison emerged as a way to illustrate emotions involved (6) in the image constructions

Cheap shoes, same as at Stocka, but if you buy them from Anttila they will break tomorrow. And teens pinch all kinds of stuff, as Anttila for sure has more stupid guards than, for example, Stocka (Eeva-Maria, 23, A).

Comparison with other companies than competitors (7) characterized what the informant meant by his description:

A little bit old-fashioned. A little bit like Aktia<sup>52</sup>, there are those ladies at the checkout, it's a bit the same with Anttila, old-maidish (Oskar, 31, I).

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<sup>46</sup> Ikea is a world famous home furnishing department store

<sup>47</sup> Stockmann is the biggest and most exclusive department store in Finland

<sup>48</sup> Sokos is the next biggest department store in Helsinki

<sup>49</sup> Skanno sells exclusive home furnishing

<sup>50</sup> A bargain store in Finland

<sup>51</sup> A bargain store in Finland

<sup>52</sup> Aktia is a Finnish bank



Informants characterized the company on a general level by comparing it with other brands on the market (8):

What kind of images are they targeting? Is it a department store for everyone where you can find whatever you are looking for with no aims of a refined image as in Stocka's case? If it has succeeded, then the products are not exclusive quality and it doesn't have to be and anyway people buy there, as they are on the Lada53 level (Vepa, 49, I).

Anttila is a Hyundai, in Kodin Anttila there is quite a lot of a Ford in it, Stockmann is a Volvo (Mikko, 48, I).

In conclusion, comparison was used by the informants to illustrate and depict the company in relation to the entity compared with, and hence, became a way of constructing images. As new experiences were compared to earlier experiences, the constructed images were either kept 'in line' with previous images or changed due to discrepancy when comparing the old experiences with the new experience.

Next, changes in image constructions are discussed.

#### 4.2.5. *How images change*

Changes in the informant's image constructions emerged in the data as sudden or slow changes over time. The changes were related to (1) informant related activity, (2) company-related activity, or (3) overall changes in the environment through changes in, for example, values in Finnish society. Figure 28 below summarizes the change dynamics that emerged in the informants' image constructions.

<i>Activity Change</i>	<b>Informant-related activity</b>	<b>Company-related activity</b>	<b>Changes in the environment</b>
<b>Slow changes over time</b>	"growing up"	Informants slowly modified his/her store knowledge (e.g., change of name).	Changes of values in society. Entrepreneurs were less valued in the 60's and 70's than in the 00's.
<b>Sudden changes</b>	New perspective for evaluating company actions (e.g., becoming an employee).	New experiences that changed the informant's view on the company (e.g., experiencing a new department).	(Did not emerge in the data, but based on deduction, could be caused by e.g., scandals, accidents or other crises.)

Figure 28 Change in informants' image constructions

<sup>53</sup> Lada is a cheap Russian car not expected to be of high quality

Next, the impulses for changes in image constructions that emerged from the data will be discussed.

### **Slow changes in image constructions caused by informant-related activity**

Slow informant-related activity that change image constructions were based on changes in the informant's life. In Vaula's interview, this is illustrated by a change of needs and situations in life, also changing the image constructions in line with her new life situations. Vaula now has a family with two small children and she is a frequent customer at Anttila as she finds it a convenient place to shop.

My image is based on my own experiences, I have a lot of them and over a long period of time, that's one source. Anttila is one of the shops that I visit regularly. That's my source. I have been visiting Anttila since I was 20. I had a flatmate who informed me about the company. She knew what it was like. In the beginning, I bought cheap pots and towels and whatever you need for a flat as a student. Little by little the selection of things I buy from there has broadened. (Earlier in the interview she defined Anttila as a department store for homes). Yes, they sell things for the home, clothes, curtains, pots, utensils, bulbs, and all you need at home, machines for the home. There are a lot of these kinds of things (Vaula, 47, I).

### **Slow changes in image constructions caused by company-related activity**

Slow changes in informants' image constructions caused by company-related activity emerged in the data regarding the company's decision to change the name of the department for home furnishings and decorations, and in changes in the product selection.

Most of the informants made a distinction between Anttila, the department store, and Kodin Anttila, the department for home furnishing and decoration, founded in 1992. In 2002, the name of the department was changed to Kodin Ykkönen, followed by a nationwide advertising campaign with the slogan 'Kodin Anttila is now Kodin Ykkönen.' In 2003, at the time of the pilot study in this research, only one informant (Vepä, 49, I) used the new name in the interview. Not even the parents of an employee used the new name. On the contrary, Eine (65, I) wondered if Kodin Anttila belongs to the same store as Anttila. Later, during the two years following when the rest of the data was collected, only a few of the informants still used the new name. Today, four years after the name change, the newspapers still frequently call the department for home furnishing by its old name<sup>54</sup>, despite that the company is one of the biggest advertisers in Finland within retailing, and advertisements from Kodin Ykkönen appear frequently in the newspapers.

Another name change had taken place in the company. Anttila's section for records and games had changed its name from Megastore to TopTen. This change had only been

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<sup>54</sup> Hufvudstadsbladet and Helsingin Sanomat, the two major newspapers in Finland, wrote on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 2005 about a robbery at Kodin Anttila. It turned out, that this news was based on a press release from The Finnish News Agency (STT) which again had received the information from an official police release. All the instances used the name Kodin Anttila. 19<sup>th</sup> of April, 2006 the head for domestic news at Helsingin Sanomat, Antero Mukka, mentions in his column Kodin Anttila as a place from where you can buy movies.

recognized by two informants, despite that the department was highly appreciated and frequently visited by many of the informants. A lively discussion on the subject took place in the group interview among the young informants:

(Inf. 4) In this account is the same which I recognized when we wrote the accounts that they have the section for music that clearly appeals to younger consumers, the Megastore thing. In both these accounts it's also mentioned as a good thing.

(Inf. 5) TopTen's Megastore, what's the image. Is it TopTen or Megastore or what? It's TopTen but what is Megastore? Is it the old name or what? Does anybody know?

(Inf. 4) It's Megastore nowadays.

(Inf. 5) It's Topten.

(Inf. 1) People speak about Topten

(Inf. 5) Nowadays it's always in the ads and it's TopTen

Anttila's food departments also caused confusion. One informant knew the history:

All Anttila grocery stores were terminated as they competed with City-Markets<sup>55</sup>. I think it was Kesko's decision (Vepa, 49, I).

A discussion in the group interview exemplifies the confusion.

(Inf. 5) What happened to the food section in Anttila?

(Mumble among the informants) Has there been any?

(Inf. 5) I haven't seen any for a long time.

(Inf. 3) There's been one in Oulu. Nowadays there is an entrepreneur.

Wasn't there one in the basement of Itä-keskus? Was it Anttila? Next to Stocka. I think there was one. Weren't they next to each other?

(Inf. 5) Then they changed it to S-market.

However, Tanja finds the department for food in Tampere excellent

Anttila's food department is one of the best in Tampere, at least the fresh food department. I think they were the first ones to change the lighting so that the tomatoes and other stuff looked really appealing. (Tanja, 28, A.)

The food department she mentions has, since 1998, been a privately own food shop in the basement of Anttila.

The difficulties in following the company actions, which emerged from the data, is probably not due to insufficient corporate communications. Nevertheless, one informant wishes clearer company communications:

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<sup>55</sup> City-Market is Kesko's own chain for grocery stores

One thing I think Anttila should work on is to create a clear image of Kodin Anttila (or is it Kodin Ykkönen?), TopTen and the original department store. Is it one and the same store? Who are the customers they want to attract? (Tero, 26, A.)

Based on the study, the informants did not stay in tune with corporate communications or changes in business strategies. From the utilitarian perspective discussed above, if the retailer is able to provide consumers fulfillment of needs on various occasions, maybe consumers do not have need for a more thorough follow-up on company actions until changes conflict with their needs<sup>56</sup>.

### **Slow changes in image constructions caused by slow environment-related changes**

Based on the data, overall changes in the environment caused slow changes in informant's image constructions. Slow changes in image constructions caused by slow environment-related changes are exemplified by Kirsi, when she expresses admiration of the founder of the company and the business.

Kalle Anttila was the founder of Anttila. Somehow it was the first thing that came to my mind. Then he went to Florida. He was too tanned in those days...It's funny that I remember Kalle Anttila because there's nothing cheap about him. He was a success even though he made a bankrupt. Like Keihänen<sup>57</sup>! There are those businessmen who became rich. He doesn't have the reputation of a 'cheap jack.' The bankruptcy was in the beginning of the 80's.(Kirsi, 48, I.)

Wealthy and rich businessmen were not generally admired in post-war Finnish society, but a slow change in values in Finnish society has occurred. A historical analysis would reveal what in her expressions reflect values of post-war Finnish society in the 1950's and 1960's, and what are influenced by current values in the Finnish society. In other words, was Kalle Anttila admired for becoming extremely rich in his days or is it an interpretation based on present values in contemporary Finnish society, where successful businessmen are more valued than before? Based on my own experiences from the 1960's and 1970's as a member of a family with entrepreneurs, I would support the conclusion that Kirsi interprets her memories based on values in contemporary Finnish society.

### **Sudden changes in image constructions caused by informant-related changes**

Sudden changes in image constructions caused by informant-related changes in the informants' life or through experiencing the company as something totally different than expected based on earlier images was another finding. Tuuli (23, A/LD) expressed a sudden change in image constructions when she changed her perspective towards the company when becoming an employee at the company. Tuuli took part in written accounts and commented in her learning diary on how she had experienced the research and how her perspective has changed now that she is an employee.

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<sup>56</sup> The delay in absorbing changes in names in this specific company case may exemplify what Shostack (1977) discussed in her seminal article under the concept of tangible clues in a service setting. Consumers do probably not easily adapt name changes in cases where the old name has become to represent tangible clues and evidence for them through earlier company-related images rooted in their memory.

<sup>57</sup> Keihänen was a businessman in the early 1970's. His wealth made him a celebrity in those days. His company went bankrupt in 1974.

It was interesting to write about associations of Anttila as I have been working there for many years and have not really thought about it much earlier. My own associations are based on present times and latest experiences. They are so strong that I don't any more remember those I had about the company ten years ago. I associate with other employees and what the company is like as an employer more than what it is like as a place to shop, as it is such a long time since I have been there as an ordinary customer (Tuuli, 23, LD).

Another similar change in the perspective emerged when two of the informants' daughter had become an employee. Especially the mother was concerned of convincing the interviewer of how good the company is:

My situation is that my daughter works there. I only have good things to say, good quality, a good selection, that's all I can say! (eine, 65, I)

Later in the interview she referred to past times:

It was awful in the old days, a lot of junk, you could never find anything. Now the level is quite different...I may be influenced by the fact that my daughter works there (Eine, 65, I).

### **Sudden changes in image constructions caused by company-related activity**

Based on the data, the two department stores at Anttila, the main Anttila and Kodin Ykkönen, were found to be experienced quite differently by informants. The difference emerged especially when the main Anttila was experienced based on earlier eras in the company's history.

I don't have any other image than the old bargain store in Tennispalatsi...it all started from there and grew according to whatever was cheap. It was the Anttila-theme and it has marked the company quite a lot. (Later, during the interview the informant describes how delighted he was when he experienced Kodin Ykkönen for the first time). I remember how I was really surprised when I visited Kodin Anttilan (for the first time) Wow! This is really a nice shop! And this changed my view of Kodin Anttila once and for all, but it has not improved my image of the main Anttila, both have their own identity. (Mikko, 48, I.)

Another informant expressed his first visit to Kodin Ykkönen in a common way:

You know it's really a nice shop! I was so surprised. Go and have a look! (Ilkka, 43, Memo.)

The sudden unexpected positive surprise had such emotional power that it changed the informants' image constructions at once. The informants experienced a radical change in the product selection and interior design at Kodin Ykkönen.

**In sum**, changes in image constructions emerged to be slow in situations when no significant events occurred compared with earlier times. The sudden changes occurred when a significant event revealed a contrast to earlier experiences and necessitated a change. Charmaz defined significant events as

"A significant event stands out in memory, because it has boundaries, intensity and emotional force..." (Charmaz 2000, 516).

#### **4.2.6. *Summary on the temporal dimension in consumers' corporate image constructions***

In this summary of the selective phase in the study focusing on the temporal dimension in consumers' image constructions, an understanding of the issue was developed. Four specific research problems were specified for the selective phase, namely, to deepen the understanding of (1) the awareness time span, (2) the content in the awareness time span, and (3) the temporal focus for image constructions. Moreover, an additional aim was to (4) develop an understanding of how images change.

(1) The awareness time span, 'the past,' was specified by its starting and end points. The starting point was established based on the earliest company-related memory the informant spontaneously recalls when constructing his image of the company. The end point was defined as the moment, the 'now,' when the image construction takes place. The constructed image also sets the scene for future expectations and planned actions and represents a promise for future. Hence, image constructions depict how past, present and future times are present in the image constructions. To conclude, images are not constructed from an empty slate, but based on earlier experiences.

(2) During the time span, a multiplicity of contacts, either directly with the company or indirectly through other sources, established the content of the awareness time span. Some of these experiences were so important to the informant that they were recalled and memorized. The content emerged as a reflection of past and present experiences, emotions and feelings from multiple sources and from various perspectives. The multiplicity of images over time was commented by one informant as:

I was surprised about how different things people keep memorable about such a well-known company as Anttila (Tanja, 28, LD).

This informant believed that other people shared her view of the company. Earlier she had rejected these views as wrong, but now she realized that there are multiple ways of experiencing a company.

Comparison between experiences from various sources emerged as a way to specify an approximation of the company in a context. Although the informant aimed at a somewhat holistic view of the company, most informants constructed a multiplicity of images, which often also were in conflict with each other.

(3) All informants' image constructions were based on earlier images. These earlier images were usually temporally focused on a specific era in the company's history, and hence, a temporal focus for image constructions emerged for every informant. Informants, whose temporal focus was in past times, had not either followed company actions, or they had not experienced anything so significant that their images would have changed. Accordingly, all company actions that caught their attention were constructed into images based on their temporally focused position in past times. In sum, all informants were temporally focused, but the temporal focus might be positioned anywhere along the consumer's company-related awareness time span.

(4) Based on the data in this study, images tended to change slowly, and if they changed, they changed mainly due to significant 'eye opening events' based on some

other source than the company. Hence, although traces of images constructed in the beginning of the awareness time span generally tended to stick, images also changed. Slow changes over time emerged both based on company actions and due to the informant's new experiences, but rapid changes emerged only based on informant-related new experiences.

#### **4.3. Theoretical phase: comparing findings with existing theory**

The theoretical phase in this chapter includes 'socializing with other researchers' research' (Glaser and Strauss 1967). In this study, chapter 2 represents the theoretical phase focusing on how corporate image has been understood within corporate image research.

Based on the findings in the present study, *image* is defined as: "*consumer's corporate images are constructed through dynamic relational processes based on a multifaceted network of earlier images from multiple sources over time.*" Thus the findings support dynamic relational views on image construction processes from multiple sources. This definition supports a number of researchers' definitions on image. The temporal dimension has widely been recognized within image research, mainly by referring to consumer memory (Keller, 2008), although sparingly studied. In sum, due to its subjectivist approach, the empirical part fulfilled its aim by providing guidelines and new understanding on consumers' corporate image construction processes, and additionally, guidelines the literature review, namely, to look for relational views on the interplay between the company and the consumer. Moreover, it provided ideas and direction for further research.

As was put forth in the introduction of the thesis, the *temporal dimension* has been implicitly and explicitly recognized by a number of scholars within corporate image research, but no empirical studies within the field of research have been conducted before from a subjectivist stance on the temporal dimension in consumers' corporate image constructions. However, some studies focus on past times and will be discussed here. The theoretical phase starts with some reflections on a selection of views that has been introduced in other disciplines than marketing or, alternatively, other fields within marketing than corporate image research.

As the emerged findings in the present study show that consumers remember their company related experiences over a long period of time, and these memories are the basis for image constructions today, the conclusion drawn is that in this theoretical phase findings from the present study are to be compared with views on image constructions and memory also within other disciplines than marketing. Therefore, the findings will be compared with concepts and studies that have connection points to the findings.

#### **A comparison of the findings within business studies and corporate image research**

Within organizational theory, sense making is an aspect closely related to imagery and image. Sense making is described by Weick as "developing sets of ideas with explanatory possibilities, rather than a body of knowledge" (Weick, 1995, xi). Thus,

sense making is an ongoing ‘conversational’ process aiming at constituting a perspective to the subject in focus. In the present study it could be recognized especially in the interviews that the informants clearly were into a sense making process when trying to make sense of their own ideas about the company. All the multiple images they constructed of the company could also be seen as explanatory possibilities of their view on the company. However, the informants’ processes did not end in any concluding outcomes; rather all the possibilities became a body of knowledge out of which the consumers construct their corporate images. Therefore, image construction emerged rather as a process where experiences were interpreted or emerged based on previous knowledge, than as a process aiming at explanatory possibilities.

Pettigrew (1997) describes a process as a sequence of individual and collective events, actions, and activities unfolding over time in context and the aim for a process analyst is to “catch this reality in flight” (338). The context in the present study is the company and the events, actions, and activities are the ones that form the content of the awareness over time.

Pettigrew (1997) specifies, that actions drive processes, but processes can not be explained just by reference to individual or collective agency (agency - the one who drives the process). The dual quality of agents and contexts must always be recognized. Contexts are shaping and shaped. (ibid, 338) Based on the present study, in which three sources for experiencing company-related issues emerged, not only the consumer’s own experiences or how s/he has experienced the company have agency in the image construction process, also other sources, like other people’s experiences or reputation may take agency in the image construction process. Based on the conducted study, image construction emerged as a triad shaped by all three agents (described as sources for image construction in the present study), but the constructed image also shaped these agents. Therefore, the consumer-constructed image may influence the company’s reputation or other people’s images of the company.

If image construction is to be understood as a process, Pettigrew specifies that in a process analysis, it is of crucial importance to focus on the temporal dimension as the interchange between agents and context occurs over time and is cumulative. The legacy of the past is always shaping the emerging future. So time and history are at the centre of any process analysis. In the present study, it emerged that it is of crucial importance to understand what past experiences the consumer holds in store as a basis for the current image construction, in other words, based on which previous images is the current image constructed on? Thus, time and history emerged to be in the center for the image construction, so for understanding the current image constructions - the outcomes - it becomes crucial to understand the triad *as an input*, and not to regard the consumer as merely a passive receiver of (pre-interpreted) messages, but as an active constructor of images and meanings, which means that time and history is in the center of the process of image construction.

According to Pettigrew, in a process analysis there is a search for patterns in the process and some attempt to compare the shape, character and incident of this pattern. Thereafter, there is a quest to find the underlying mechanisms which shape any patterning in the observed processes (Pettigrew 1997, 339). In the present study, the pattern of constructing current images based on previous images emerged as a pattern in



the image construction. Comparison, feelings and perspective can be seen as mechanisms for shaping the image constructions, which are the informant's ideas about the company.

However, Pettigrew defines processes as cumulative. In the present study, images did not emerge as cumulative, but as multiple independent image construction processes in which the outcomes could be contradictory. Informants did not, hence, strive for any consensus in the image construction; on the contrary, multiplicity and multidimensionality emerged frequently. Only those informants with a short awareness time span and a limited number of experiences expressed singularity and few-dimensionality in their image constructions. Hedaa and Törnroos (2003) developed an 'event network model' in which events are connected to each other as crystallized in the past, and amorphous and uncertain in the future. They propose the event network model as a way for understanding 'connected exchange relationships' (dyads) between business actors and as a way to grasp the temporality and process/change in network evolution and change. (4) Within corporate image research, methods for identifying brand association networks have been developed by Zaltman and Coulter (1995), Henderson, Iacobucci et al. (1998) and John, Loken et al. (2006). Zaltman and Coulter's approach (ZMET) allows consumers complete freedom to express their conscious and non-conscious brand perceptions whereas the John, Loken et al. approach (BCM) focuses on the most important core associations that consumers connect to the brand and how these associations are interconnected. Neither of the mapping methods takes, however, the time dimensions into account. Based on the present study, a similar kind of image network can be developed based on every informant's account, with the significant difference that the network model should have a time line as the images were grounded in past experiences and from multiple sources.

Images may change, and change emerged frequently in informants' image constructions, which indicates that the image construction process is dynamic, not static. Weick (1976) has named the starting point for sense making as an ecological change (that is, something happens), which is a prerequisite for reaction. Ecological change will cause the stage of selection in which previous 'data' in the individuals mind sorts out the final retention. As mentioned earlier, change requires a significant event, called ecological change by Weick (1976), which stands out in one's memory due intensity, emotional force and boundaries. Hence, the possibility of change is present in every new image construction process, but the experience requires significance defined by the consumer. In every change that emerged in the data, the informant had experienced something significant that changed his/her view. Within advertising, Romaniuk and Nicholls (2006) emphasize that one of the key objectives of advertising is to influence the perceptions consumers hold about a brand in their memory (179). However, although the methods explicitly focus on memory, change is within the field measured based on changes in brand-attribute linkage from one point in time to another. Hence, the approach is based on the assumption that time is linear and moves in one direction only. Additionally, within the genre of how brand attributes change the approaches are generally quantitative, and the aim is to measure advertising campaigns effect on the brand attributes (Romaniuk & Nicholls 2006), not for example, the roots for consumer perceptions. Memory and memories are in focus in some specific fields of marketing, namely "roots marketing" (Nancarrow, Tinson et al. 2007), focusing on the sense of

belonging to one's country of origin among migrants from a product preference perspective, whereas nostalgic marketing and retro-brand studies (see Brown, Kozinets et al. 2003; Hatch & Rubin 2006) focus on the effect of using historical periods or product brands in the company's marketing communications and product development.

However, problems due to memory is the focus in Percy's (2004) discussion on how memory distorts consumers' advertising and other marketing communications interpretations. In comparison with traditional linear communication models (see for example Fill 2006, 37), the 'seven sins of memory,' as called by Percy, represent a noise factor in the traditional model. Next, these factors will be discussed here in relation to the conducted study.

First, the problem of *transience* implies that consumers recall what they expect to be in the advertisement due to their prior understanding of the brand. Thus, interpretation is based on prior understanding, not on what the specific company de facto 'put' in the advertisement. The present study supports this as the findings show in numerous accounts that the informants interpret company actions based on previous experiences, despite that they took place, for example, in the 1970's. Second, *absent-mindedness* occurs more likely in situations of routine experiences and routine behavior resulting in 'change blindness.' The findings support change blindness as, for example, many informants had not recognized that the company had changed its name. Third, *blocking* occurs when something is recognized but the specific issue is not remembered. Percy suggests that appropriate triggers like emotional memories may help in remembering the right brand name. Blocking emerged in the present study as one of the informants had a bad image of the case company, but could not recall the reason. Fourth, *misattribution* occurs when something correctly remembered is attributed to a wrong source. In the present study misattribution occurred when informants spontaneously reflected upon colors used in the company's logo. One informant mentioned e.g. green and white but based on the company's home pages on internet<sup>58</sup> (visited 14.11.2007), the logo has since the company was founded been red. Fifth, *suggestibility* occurs when someone tends to include information that has been learned from someone else. Due to the research approach, suggestibility is not a bias in the conducted study as, despite numerous experiences, only those remembered hold meaning (Braun-La Tour, La Tour et al. 2007). Sixth, *bias* refer to how the memory of past experiences greatly influences how new information or situations are perceived. It can be assumed that all informants reflect upon the case company in a 'new' way after taking part in the study and recalling memories. Without being more specific, in my own case, as being more aware of my own memories, I have recognized changes in how I perceive the company today. Seventh, *persistence* relates to that "emotionally charged experiences are better remembered than less emotional occasions" (Percy 2004). In the data this could be recognized especially in childhood memories. In short, most memory-related influences discussed by Percy could be recognized in the data. However, as was pointed out earlier, everything that is remembered and how it is remembered influences the image construction today. Therefore, the influences discussed by Percy are more answers to why the informants remembered what they mentioned and can be explored in grater detail in future research.

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<sup>58</sup> [www.anntila.fi](http://www.anntila.fi) visited 14.11.2007

Within image research, the meaning of childhood memories in brand preference has been studied by Braun-La Tour, La Tour and Zinkhan (2007). In their study they focused on automobile memories by three generations of automobile consumers for illustrating how childhood memories symbolize the consumer-brand relationship and how this insight can add to the understanding of brand meaning. The authors emphasize that previous academic studies focusing on the meaning of childhood experiences from a brand preferences and relationship perspective are non-existing, although within consultancy the recognition of the issue has been successful. In the study the authors used earliest memories (EM) and defining memories (DM) as projective techniques to uncover brand meanings. The authors found in their study that earliest memories occur at the average age of six and defining memories at the average age of 14. Based on the memories, the authors created a memory network map, which the authors suggest can provide insight for marketers. The major implication the authors suggest is that automobile manufacturers should be aware of the role the product has played in consumers' past for gaining insight into what consumers want in the future (Braun-La Tour, La Tour et al. 2007). The findings from the present study support the findings in the Braun-La Tour, La Tour et al. study emphasizing the importance of earlier memories in image constructions today. The Braun-La Tour, La Tour et al. study does not, however, focus on the temporal dimension per se, but that particularly childhood memories influence present product choice.

Next, the generated view on consumer constructed corporate images and the temporal dimension in the image construction, image heritage, will be discussed and a suggestion for how to conceptualize image heritage will be given.

#### **4.4. The emerged view on consumer constructed corporate images and image heritage**

Based on the conducted study with a grounded theory approach, a generated view on consumers' corporate image constructions emerged, including the temporal dimension. The main findings of how the informants constructed their corporate images are summarized in Figure 29



<b>1. Awareness time span</b>	Short time span, future expectations	Long time span, future expectations
<b>2. Awareness of the company's history</b>	Little or no awareness of the company's history	Well aware of the company's history
<b>3. Perspectives</b>	Single / few	Single / few / multiple
<b>4. Temporal focus</b>	Recent times Single	Recent and / or past times. Single / multiple
<b>5. Sources</b>	Single / few sources	Multiple sources
<b>6. Content</b>	Recent experiences, emotions	Recent and past experiences / emotions / change
<b>7. Image constructions</b>		
<b>Conclusions</b>	Images constructed based on quite recent experiences: <b>one- or few-dimensional images based on a limited number of sources over time</b>	Images constructed based on both past and recent experiences: <b>multifaceted network of images based on multiple sources over time</b>

Figure 29 Summary on image constructions

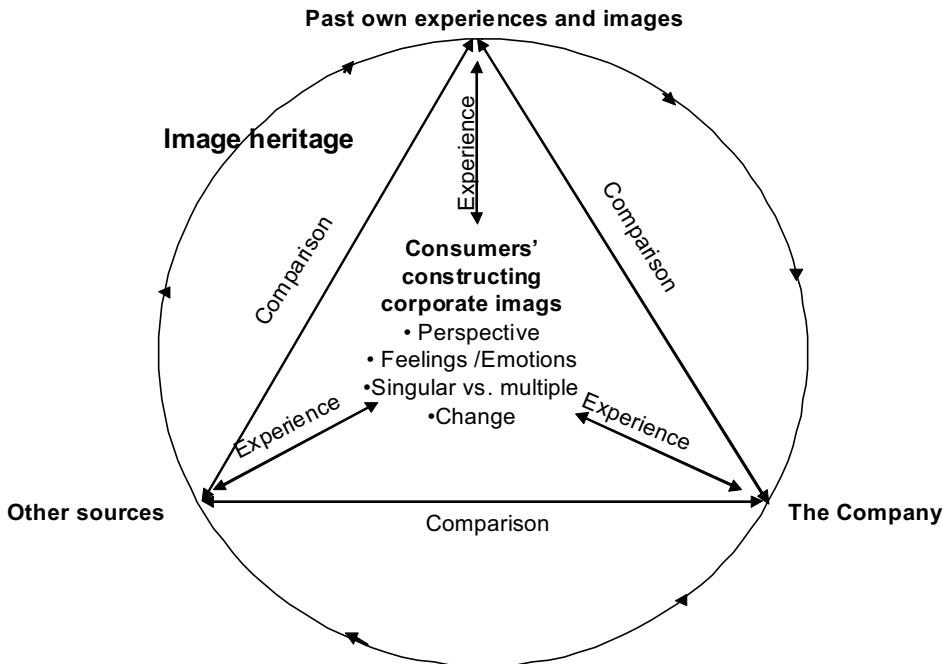
Based on the findings an understanding developed that consumers' corporate images are constructed as processes based on earlier experiences from multiple sources over time and directed by emotions and feelings. Additionally, multiplicity also emerged through temporal separation of images, and contradictory images. As images can change during the time span, the construction process was found to be dynamic. Therefore, based on the data, corporate image constructions emerged to be dynamic constructions based on multiple images from many sources and temporally multi-dimensional.

Therefore, it is proposed that consumer constructed corporate images is defined as follows:

*Consumer's corporate images are constructed through dynamic relational processes based on a multifaceted network of earlier images from multiple sources over time.*

In Figure 30 the image construction process is depicted in relation to the content in image heritage. The content in image heritage consists of memories from multiple sources over time which are recalled and compared to the company-related experience here and now. For example, when noticing an advertisement in the newspaper the

interpretation of the message is interpreted based on earlier images. As was pointed out earlier, people are not *tabula rasa*, that is, ‘blank sheets’ on which communication messages are printed, rather new messages are compared to earlier recalled memories from multiple sources. It is pointed out that the company is not the only source for image constructions here and now. Whatever source in the consumer’s environment, and also the consumer her/himself can activate the corporate image construction processes. As depicted in Figure 30, the image construction processes includes also emotions and the consumer’s perspective towards the company, which altogether can result in a change of the image or become an additional image of the company.



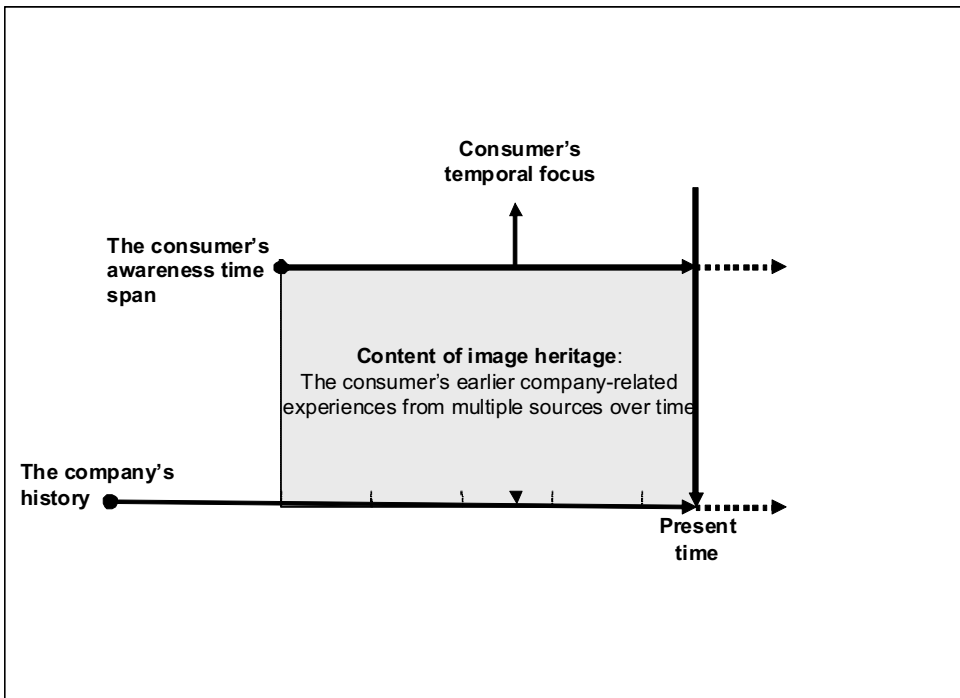
**Figure 30 The consumer's image construction process**

Based on the findings an understanding of the temporal dimension in consumers' corporate image constructions developed, which previously has been a neglected area for empirical study until now. The temporal dimension in consumers' corporate image constructions can be depicted as the consumer's mental relationship with the company over time as past times are present in current corporate image constructions, either consciously or unconsciously.

The use of the word 'relationship' is grounded in the notion that relationships do not only exist between individuals, but also as para-social relationships between individuals and products, companies or other objects. Para-social relationships operate on image levels, and are not necessarily based on direct contact with the company, but with company-related experiences (Gummeson 2002). Here, in this study, the mental relationship over time includes all experiences that can at a certain moment be recalled. Earlier experiences and images are not always conscious at a certain moment, but stored

in a sedimentary way in the consumer's memory and recalled currently by some specific trigger. Hence, it can be pointed out that not only memories that are actively held in memory, but also latent memories can be evoked and should not be overseen. However, this mental relationship over time and its content is here conceptualized as image heritage. The consumer's individual image heritage is the foundation for the consumer's current corporate image constructions.

As is illustrated in Figure 31 image heritage is specified through its dimensions: length of the consumer's awareness time span, content of the consumer's earlier company related experiences from multiple sources over time, and main temporal focus or foci for interpreting company actions into images today.



**Figure 31 Image heritage and its components in relation to the company's history**

The dimensions of image heritage are defined as:

- *The awareness time span* depicts a time span of the consumer's previous experiences in relation to the company, out of which memories may stem. It starts when the consumer for the first time experiences the company and 'ends' in the current image construction.
- *The content of stored memories from multiple sources over time* is activated for interpreting company-related experiences today
- *A temporal focus*, depicting concentration(s) of memory cues or stimuli from one specific or multiple era(s) in the company's history.

Based on the study, image heritage is here suggested to be conceptualized as:

*Image heritage is the consumer's earlier company-related experiences from multiple sources over time activated for interpreting company-related experiences today.*

In the next chapter the conclusion, implications and contribution of the study will be discussed.

## 5 DISCUSSION

In this chapter the theoretical and methodological conclusions, implications and contributions of the study will be discussed. Additionally, managerial implications and suggestions for further research are given in the end of the chapter.

### 5.1. Theoretical discussion

This study is positioned within strategic corporate image research within marketing, a specification necessary, as many of the concepts used in the thesis not only have their origin, but also long research traditions, in other disciplines. The core concepts in this thesis are *image* and *image heritage*. Within the broad corporate image research arena, the perspective for this study is that of the consumer. As stated in Chapter 1 (section 1.3.), the purpose of the study was to contribute to the understanding of how consumers construct their corporate images with a special interest in the temporal focus therein, and to bridge this understanding on consumer-constructed corporate images over time with the organization-focused views within image research. With this understanding, avenues for future branding will be suggested in which the importance of consumer-orientation within branding is pinpointed.

The research problem was formulated as:

*How do consumers construct their corporate images?*

Based on the explorative study, the research problem was specified to *focus on the temporal dimension in consumers' corporate image constructions?*

The study was conducted with a grounded theory approach and showed that consumers' corporate images evolved over time.

*Consumer's corporate images are constructed through dynamic relational processes based on a multifaceted network of earlier images from multiple sources over time.*

This dynamic relational view of consumer-constructed corporate images as evolving, which are based on earlier experiences over time, is therefore positioned in the research tradition of process-oriented views within corporate image research. Image heritage stands for the temporal dimension in the individual consumer's image construction processes. The concept image heritage was generated from findings in the empirical study.

In line with the twofold research problem, the main findings can be divided into two:

- An understanding of consumers' corporate *image constructions* as dynamic relational *processes* based on a *multifaceted network of images from multiple sources over time*



- An understanding of the temporal dimension in the consumers' image construction processes. The temporal dimension was conceptualized as *image heritage*.

*Image heritage is the consumer's earlier company-related experiences from multiple sources over time activated for interpreting company-related experiences in the present.*

Therefore, the past is present as image heritage in the consumer's current corporate image construction processes due to memory.

The individual consumer's *image heritage* depicts the individual consumer's company-related memories that can be activated by cues or stimuli to interpret company-related experiences in the present. Although only fractions are retained, not exact reproductions, they hold meaning (Braun-La Tour, La Tour et al. 2007). Image heritage is specified through its components: the awareness time span, the content of stored memories from multiple sources over time and a temporal focus.

- *The awareness time span* depicts a time span of the consumer's previous experiences in relation to the company, out of which memories may stem. It starts when the consumer for the first time experiences the company and 'ends' in the current image construction.
- *The content of stored memories from multiple sources over time* is activated for interpreting company-related experiences in the present.
- *A temporal focus*, depicting concentration(s) of memory cues or stimuli from one specific or multiple era(s) in the company's history.

Based on the study, novel insights into consumer-constructed corporate images are provided as no earlier studies exist within the research tradition for describing and defining the temporal dimension in the consumer's image construction processes.

Moreover, the generated understanding of consumers' image construction processes and the temporal dimension therein indicate that *the future of branding is based on a relational dynamic view of images as evolving over time through social processes in cultural contexts necessitating an understanding of image heritage*.

In the following, the conclusions, implications and suggested contributions of the study are discussed. Finally, the presentation aims at presenting implications for further research within the broad field of image research in marketing.

### **5.1.1. Conclusions, theoretical implications and contributions of the study**

It is more the rule than exception that corporate images are considered to be created and managed by the company. On a general level the implications are that branding is focused on transactions rather than episodes, relationships and networks. Moreover, the company is seen as the sender of messages and the consumer as the receiver of these specific messages. In this classic communication model (see e.g. Fill 2006) a 'noise

factor' indicates that the message may not always be interpreted as it was intended by the company. Therefore, it is recognized that the company may not have full control of consumers' interpretations. However, the model suggests that the consumer is a passive receiver of messages. This view of the consumer as a passive receiver of messages has been criticized both within image, marketing communications and consumer culture research during the last decade with the argument that the consumer is not passive, s/he is an active constructor of images, meanings and relationships with products and companies urging for consumer-focused views within image research (Fournier 1998).

Based on the present study in which a subjectivist consumer-focused view was taken, corporate images were found to be constructed through *dynamic relational processes based on a multifaceted network of earlier images from multiple sources over time*. This view is in stark contrast with the traditional view of the company as the constructor of images and the consumer as a passive receiver of these messages. However, the findings support Williams and Moffitt's (1997) definition developed from a review on a number of scholars' views on image. They specify that "image is a product of a multiple-variable impression formation *process* located in the interaction among organizational texts, environmental and individual or personal factors" (ibid, 238). As a conclusion from the findings in the study and the discussions presented, images and brands are *consumer constructions* and should be studied as such. *The first implication* is therefore that consumers' corporate image constructions should be studied from a consumer-focused *process oriented view* rather than from an organization-focused linear approach mirroring the organization's branding programs.

Pettigrew (1997, 340) emphasizes that in process studies a search for holistic rather than linear explanations of processes is recommended and that context and actions is described through the embeddedness of various factors and temporal interconnectedness. The present study challenges traditional linear corporate image and brand management models as it emerged that consumers' corporate image construction processes did not seem to take 'one' outcome, rather they were processes of multiple images from past and present times indicating a temporal interconnectedness. Additionally, images were constructed based on a multifaceted network of earlier images from multiple sources over time. The temporal interconnectedness was accentuated as it emerged to be the basis for the image constructions today, thus being also the context for interpreting company actions into images currently in the consumers' minds. The embeddedness of context and action emerged in the findings in relation to how images changed. Images changed in relation to all available sources and based on various experiences over time. Therefore, the conclusion is that image constructions are dynamic relational processes evolving based on multiple sources over time. Therefore, the second implication is that *the temporal dimension* should be considered in corporate image research. The temporal dimension will be further elaborated on in the next section.

Third, in Williams and Moffitt's (1997) definition it is recognized that the company is only one of the influencers and sources for consumers' image constructions together with other multiple sources. The present study supports this view, but extends Williams and Moffitt's view from focusing on interactions to a relationship-focus due to the temporal dimension involved in the image construction processes. The third theoretical implication is therefore suggested to be that the consumers' corporate images

constructions should be studied as dynamic *relational processes* evolving from a multifaceted network of images from multiple sources over time. Relational in the context of corporate image research is therefore suggested to indicate both the social and the temporal dimensions in the consumers' image construction processes.

Relational views on individual level image research have focused on brand relationships and meanings and on the social construction of images within, for example, brand communities. These views, as was mentioned before, do not aim to contribute to branding. Neither do they focus on the temporal dimension. Relational dynamic views within branding are few. For example, Kapferer (2005) has proposed the relational identity prism model, Gioia, Schultz et al. (2000) suggest a process model of identity-image interplay and Hatch and Schultz (2002) propose the dynamic relational interplay model between image and identity. Within image research the focus is on the interplay between image and identity, rather than on analyzing the relationship dynamics or incongruence between the concepts. However, relationship management and service marketing are fields of research that focus on the relationship between the consumer and the company, although image has remained relatively unstudied albeit recognized (Grönroos 1984) within the field. The implications are that there are multiple reasons to suggest cross-fertilization between image research and relationship management and service marketing research.

For example, within relationship management a shift from value-delivery to value-in-use has developed. Value is constructed as a dynamic process in a relational manner between the consumer and the product or service in use and over time. In the present study, similarities with the value-in-use concept emerged concerning the consumers' image construction processes. They were also constructed as an 'image-in-use' process activated by something, in this specific case the research situation, and constructed based on all available sources in the consumers' memory over time. Likewise as value, also images were constructed as dynamic processes in relational manners between the present experience, future expectations and past recalled memories from multiple sources over time. Therefore, the image evolved as an 'image-in-use', every time something in relation to the company was activated and past and present experiences as well as future expectations were present 'at the same time', which can be called 'image-in-use'. The images evolved based on a network of images from multiple sources over time. This network of 'images-in-use' provided a holistic view of image dynamics rather than a more limited linear and static view of attributes and attitudes as end-states. Likewise, as is recommended within relationship management literature, it is suggested here for the company to try to understand, get access and get involved in these situations when the image is in use and there develop their consumer-knowledge and dialogue with the consumer.

Fourth, although the influence from other sources like the company's competitors or the consumer's own network of corporate image constructions is well recognized, branding models focus on the image-identity interplay per se, not on the network of influential relationships. The findings in this study illustrate that corporate images are not solely constructed based on company actions, but rather from a multifaceted network of images from multiple sources over time. Therefore, the fourth implication is that the focus within image research should be on *understanding images from a network perspective constructed from multiple sources* rather than solely from an image-identity

perspective as many other sources also influence the consumer's image construction processes.

The fifth conclusion drawn from the present study is that images are dynamic, they may change but they change in relation to all available sources over time. Therefore, there is not necessarily any 'one' image of the company, but multiple images constructed over time so that the consumer's corporate images may also be contradictory on the individual level. Image change has remained an understudied field from the consumer-focus due to the underpinnings in the organization-focused branding literature that generally considers images as created by the organization. Therefore, in situations where the identity is changing due to mergers and acquisitions, for example, or other needs from the organization's perspective, the created images are supposed to change accordingly. In principle, organizational identity is essentially viewed according to the definition specified by Albert and Whetten (1985) as that what is central, enduring, and distinctive about an organization. However, Gioia, Schultz et al. (2000) present the view of adaptive instability, arguing that identities are dynamic due to their interrelationship with image. Therefore, they assume images to be dynamic. Identity is proposed to be a work-in-process in line with Higgins' view of the self, but like Higgins (1987, in Urde 1999) neither Gioia, Schultz et al. recognize past 'selves' as an issue in the work-in-process. In conclusion, Gioia, Schultz et al. propose that the management concern is to be able to manage and balance a flexible identity in light of changing images. In the present study some circumstances of how images change were found. Changes were not, however, related solely to changes in the organization, rather to changes in the individual's own life. Therefore, the conclusions and theoretical implications are that images change in relation to all available sources over time and should be studied as dynamic constructions.

Next, conclusions and implications of the developed understanding of the temporal dimension in consumers' corporate image constructions, namely image heritage will be discussed.

### **Conclusions and theoretical implications of image heritage**

Based on the study, image heritage is understood as the individual consumer's earlier company-related experiences from multiple sources over time, activated for interpreting company-related experiences in the present. Image heritage is specified through its components: the awareness time span, the content of stored memories from multiple sources over time and a temporal focus. The conclusions and theoretical implications will be discussed based on the components in image heritage.

From an organization-focused view, a long-term approach is one of the cornerstones within branding as 'coherence and consistency in all actions' is one of the basic guidelines given for companies both on the strategic and operational level. Due to its influential position, the guideline is also relevant for frequent argumentation, especially due to the view of a postmodern marketplace.

As Schultz et al. express, the position on the marketplace takes time to get established, but at the same time it is image dependent.

Corporate brands are established and developed over a long time and in interaction with existing cultures and images (Schultz, Antorini et al. 2005, 20; Schultz 2006, 20).

In other words, should a company stick to coherence and consistency in branding despite increasingly complex and turbulent environments (Gioia, Schultz et al. 2000) or should it change branding strategies and operations according to ‘the context and whim?’ Probably due to lack of consumer-focused research within the field, the discussion has remained under debate. However, as was discussed in chapter one, memory in consumers’ corporate image constructions has explicitly or implicitly been recognized by many authors. For example, Kotler and Keller argue:

Effective brand management requires a long-term view of market decisions. Because consumer responses to marketing activity depend on what they know and remember about a brand, short-term marketing actions, by changing brand knowledge, necessarily increase or decrease the success of future marketing actions. Additionally, a long-term view results in proactive strategies designed to maintain and enhance customer-based brand equity over time in the face of external changes in the marketing environment and internal changes in a firm’s marketing goals and programs (Kotler & Keller 2005, 291).

Based on the present study, the conclusion is drawn that a long-term view within a company may from a consumer-oriented perspective consider image heritage and all its components, *the awareness time span, the content of stored memories from multiple sources over time* and *the temporal focus for interpreting company actions*. The theoretical implications are to consider image heritage as one of the branding strategy components and thereby introduce a subjectivist consumer-focus into branding.

The consumer’s *awareness time span* starts when the consumer for the first time experiences the company and ‘ends’ at the moment of current image constructions. The content of stored memories in relation to the company from multiple sources over time is the basis out of which memories may stem. It is expressed by Zaltman as:

When consumers are exposed to product concepts, company stories, or brand information, they don’t passively absorb those messages. Instead, they create their own meaning by mixing information from the company with their own memories, other stimuli present at the moment, and the metaphors that come to mind as they think about the firm’s message (Zaltman 2003, 14).

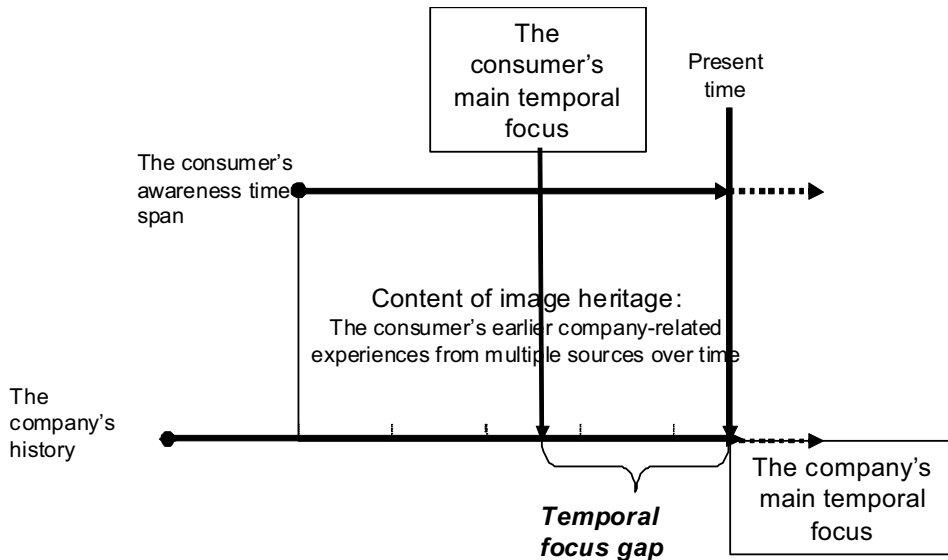
Therefore, the awareness time span depicts the ‘mental relationship’ the consumer has with the company over time. Thus a long-term view in branding considers not only past company actions from the organization’s perspective, but also the *content of the consumer’s stored memories from multiple sources over time* depicting the consumer’s view of the company’s history. On a more general level, companies as well as other entities have a history, but the purpose and the perspective for writing a corporate history differ. As Gummeson (2000) notes, company histories have often been written in connection with an anniversary and range in style and depth due to the purpose. Therefore, based on the findings in the image heritage study, corporate history might as well be written from a consumer perspective revealing the roots of how the company has been experienced by the consumers over the years both internally and externally. As image heritage depicts the content of stored memories from multiple sources over time, it also may reveal reasons for success or failure during the company’s history. The theoretical implications are that the content of stored memories may not only reveal the

roots of corporate images, but also provide a basis for a dialogue approach in marketing communications for companies.

“Customers’ brand relationship is based on a variety of brand contacts” (Grönroos 2000, 289). Therefore, everything a company does or does not can become a message of the company. The present study showed, however, that also other sources than the company provides the consumer with ‘image cues’ over time. It is evident that the company cannot control the consumer’s image construction process due to its multiplicity, but the company can get an insight into the content of image heritage through subjectivist approaches. As it is the basis for image constructions today, image heritage knowledge can also provide useful information for dialogical communications strategies that resonate with the consumer’s image heritage. As expressed by Grönroos, “the marketer can only create favorable conditions for a brand image to develop in consumers’ minds” (2000, 285). These favorable conditions have to be based on consumer knowledge, within which image heritage is crucial. The implications are therefore that image heritage should be included in strategic marketing communications models as a provider of consumer knowledge, but also on the operational level in the models as the content in image heritage can directly guideline the company as to what elements to include in its communication messages. Therefore, image heritage has implications for the understanding of consumers within marketing communications.

However, not all consumer memories may be equally important in the consumer’s corporate image construction process. Some eras may have become more memorable for the consumer than others. The *temporal focus* depicts concentration(s) of memory cues or stimuli on one specific or multiple era(s) in the company’s history. Hence, a temporal focus also becomes a temporal context and different contexts enable different memories to arise (Gordon 2006). In the present study, some informants had only vaguely followed company actions during the last decade and based their interpretations of company actions on experiences they had 20-30 years ago. Therefore, consumers may be almost totally focused on earlier eras in the company’s history and ignorant to, for example, change in the company’s identity. In the present study, it was found that despite remarkable company actions and recent branding strategies, some consumers focused on an earlier era in the company’s history and did not recognize the change through marketing communications. Additionally, some informants in the present study with their temporal focus 30 years back in time also interpreted all contacts with the company based on their temporal focus, resulting in temporally outdated interpretations from the consumer. This temporal focus gap between the company and the consumer has not been recognized within branding or marketing communications literature. Therefore, it is suggested that image heritage and the temporal focus should be recognized in brand communication and marketing communications models as it provides important information of the consumer to be considered by the company.

In Figure 32 the temporal focus gap is illustrated by a fictive situation.



**Figure 32 Temporal focus gap between the company and the consumer**

In the Figure the temporal focus represents the main temporal era in the company's history that the consumer focuses on when interpreting company-related experiences in the present.

Image heritage is especially interesting in current market conditions in which the consumer has access to multiple sources of information that he/she also actively mixes in contrast to more stable markets not so long ago. As new information is compared to stored memories, image heritage, then earlier times in a company's history can be used as a resource in differentiating and positioning the company on the marketplace today. Evidently, image heritage can also be a burden. However, this insight of image heritage emphasizes and urges for consumer-oriented subjectivist research approaches as the *content of stored memories from multiple sources* are activated for interpreting company-related experiences today.

However, we live at the crossroads of 'old times' and 'new times,' which may result in interesting differences among consumers.

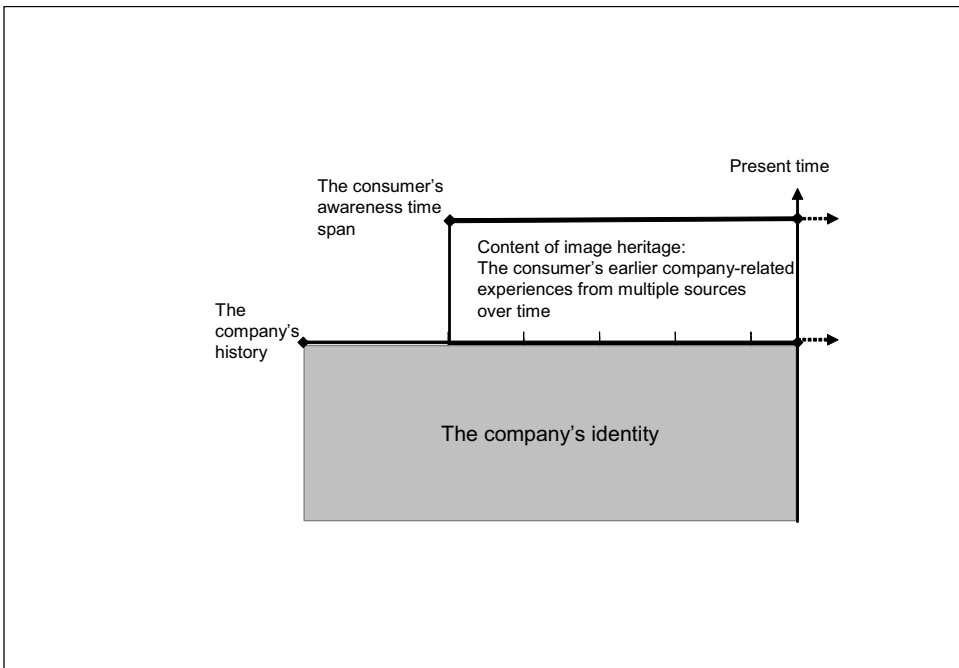
Just a generation ago, there were relatively stable realities to get to grips with. Companies grew over the years and became established members of the community. Their founders and top executives were known. Generations of local families would work in them for life. Their facilities were visible realities. They tended to support good causes that benefited their communities, and so on. Employees became immersed in company cultures that had evolved over years, though values and characteristics were rarely articulated. Projected identities tended to be representations of these realities (Topalian 2003, 1122).

Therefore, there might be image heritage differences among consumers with longer awareness time spans of image heritage in comparison with those with shorter time spans of image heritage. The implications of this may be the development of

segmentation strategies based on image heritage. As a result, image heritage may be seen as a new segmentation criterion.

Reputation management represents within corporate image research the concept that considers the temporal dimension from an organization-focused view. As mentioned earlier, corporate reputation is defined as a collective representation based on company actions. Therefore, reputation represents a collective memory shared by a group of people depicting the lowest common denominator, not the multiplicity in past experiences. Neither did it depict the informant's personal *temporal focus* for image constructions. In the present study reputation emerged as only one of the sources for experiencing the company. Thus reputation is one aspect for the consumer to consider in the image construction process.

To summarize, image heritage - identity interplay and the relation therein has been the focus of some recent articles and models. However, none of the models has included nor focused on the temporal dimension. In Figure 33 both the temporal dimension in both identity and image are introduced based on the understanding the present study provided. Image heritage is in the Figure suggested to be the relational arena to study both in strategic and operational branding contexts as well as in marketing communications contexts.



**Figure 33** The interplay between image heritage and identity



**In sum**, the purpose of the study, that is, to enhance the understanding of how consumers construct corporate images with an emphasis on describing and defining the temporal dimension in the image constructions, has been fulfilled. The theoretical **contribution** of the thesis lies in the exploration of the temporal dimension in individual level image constructions, which represents a new approach to research within corporate image research. In conclusion, this study contributes to all fields of corporate image research as it introduces a temporal dimension into consumer constructed corporate images which, in the future, hopefully, will become a new stream of research within image management in which images are studied based on a dynamic view of the consumers' image construction processes.

In Figure 34, the overall contribution is depicted and the future of branding based on a relational and dynamic view of images as evolving over time through social processes in cultural contexts, which is indicated by the 'new linkage' line in the Figure.

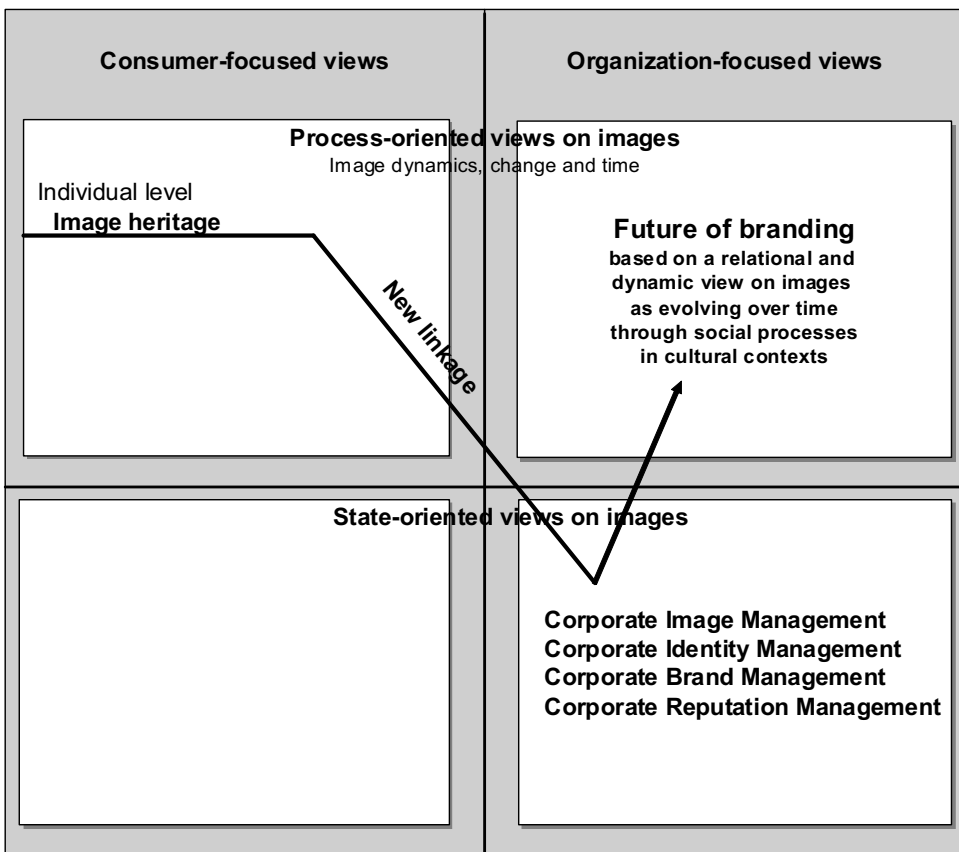
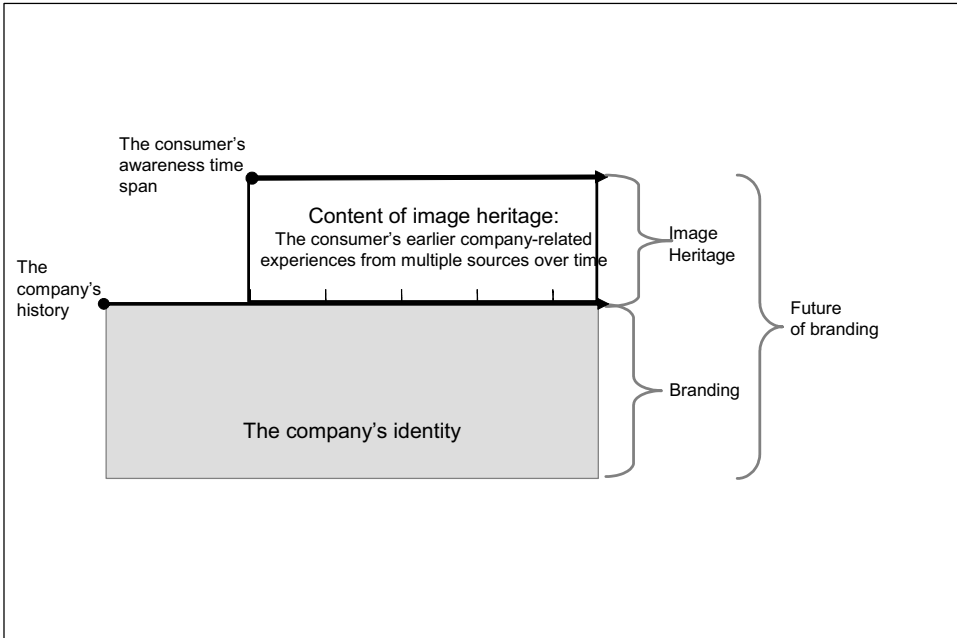


Figure 34 The contribution of the study

Additionally, the study contributes to the field of corporate image research by providing a new understanding based on a study with a subjectivist stance. As image heritage reveals roots for corporate images, it provides important knowledge for new corporate branding strategies based on genuine consumer knowledge. In Figure 35, the future of branding is depicted more specifically as a view within which consumer understanding and here, image heritage is incorporated into the company's branding strategy.



**Figure 35 Future branding strategies**

Image heritage is a consumer-concept and thus differs from brand heritage, which is assumed to depict in organization-focused literature the organization's view of its branding activities and maybe its mirror effects among consumers. Therefore, brand heritage provides a narrow and limited view of the consumer's image constructions over time.

Finally, as corporate image strategies to a large extent are implemented through integrated marketing communication, within which voices for dialogical communication approaches have been raised, they provide image heritage knowledge good ground for consumer understanding. It has also been emphasized that access to the consumer's 'mind-space' is a scarce resource nowadays. Both dialogue and mind-space require understanding of how consumers think. Image heritage provides understanding of the temporal dimension in consumer understanding, emphasizing the importance of subjectivist research approaches also within integrated marketing communications.

## 5.2. Methodological discussion

Within marketing, and especially within marketing communications and corporate image research, a growing need for a dialogue on the qualitative research approaches as well as an interest in new research approaches and methods has emerged during the late 1990's (Daymon & Holloway 2002; Livesey 2002). The development towards appreciation and interest in research with other worldviews than traditional realist views is due to an increasing awareness of the need to understand different stakeholders from their own subjective perspective. Postmodern and interpretive approaches with a subjective stance have challenged the hitherto dominating realist worldview, which, as has been mentioned, focuses on managing the corporate brand and communication from an objective stance. Subjectivist approaches are needed in marketing research for reaching an understanding that enables practitioners to engage in collaborative dialogue with all stakeholders (Daymond & Holloway 2002), to understand brand experiences (Fournier & Yao 1997) and to understand brands as cultural resources and ingredients to produce the self as one chooses (Holt 2002).

Although a methodological revolution has been taking place within the social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln 2003), Daymond and Holloway (2002) also criticizes that within qualitative approaches a realist worldview can be found.

Even where qualitative methods are used, it is not unusual to find a realist stance behind the interpretive façade (Daymond and Holloway 2002, 8).

Concerning the present study, the degree of subjectivism (Morgan & Smircich 1980) is of interest. From a psychological perspective, image construction is a human universal in the sense that it is a subjective experience, typical for human beings (Richardson 1999). Thus, from a subjective perspective the world is what one perceives it to be (Merleau-Ponty 2004), which would require ultimate subjectivity (Morgan and Smircich 1980). It is out of scope for the present study to philosophically discuss what ultimate subjectivity is. Within the framework of the present study, especially the degree of 'the voice' of the researcher can be discussed (Lincoln and Guba 2003). Additionally, the analysis may reveal a realist worldview in that the knowledge accumulation becomes 'building blocks' adding to the 'edifice of knowledge,' generalizations and cause-effect linkages (Lincoln and Guba 2003, 259-260).

This study was based on a constructivist paradigm recognizing the existence of multiple subjectively experienced realities, which requires according to Denzin and Lincoln (2004), a naturalistic set of methodological procedures. From a social constructionist view, knowledge is constructed in interactions with other people, artifacts and the environment. As mentioned earlier, studies of consumers' corporate image constructions processes from an 'ultimate' subjectivist stance are few and no studies exist for understanding the temporal dimension therein. Therefore, the inductive, explorative and grounded approach chosen in the study provides not only new knowledge, but also new ideas for methods to study images.

### ***5.2.1. Conclusions, methodological implications and contributions of the study***

In the present study, consumers' corporate images are understood as subjectively experienced knowledge constructed over time. Due to the relativist worldview and image heritage, corporate images, seen as the body of knowledge, are manifold as consumers' individual experiences differ over time. However, due to the cultural embeddedness of experiences, it is believed that the corporate images overlap to some degree and have connection points to the company's understanding of its history and can therefore be comprehended by the company when studied from a subjectivist stance.

The implications from this insight are that when focusing on the individual consumer's experiences over time, the image heritage, it will depict the consumers' 'version' of the company's history, revealing critical and favorable incidents in the company's history to the benefit of the company and other interests groups.

Therefore, the methodological contributions are suggested to be:

First, the research approach and research process presented in Chapter 1 and especially Chapter 3, may methodologically guide and inspire other researchers when studying and developing the concept of image heritage further as such, or in other business contexts. Additionally, chapter 3 may also guide companies in their attempts to study the company's image heritage for advancing their understanding of specific stakeholder groups' image heritage or to get a general picture of the company's image heritage. Therefore, it is proposed that chapter 3 as a whole is a methodological contribution of the study for studying image heritage.

Moreover, grounded theory and especially the 'glaserian' version of it have been used sparingly, not only within corporate image research, but also within marketing. Therefore, both chapters 3 and 4 contribute to previous research as an illustration of a grounded theory research approach within corporate image research.

Additionally, it is important to emphasize that the interviewing atmosphere should be supportive and enthusiastic so that informants freely reflect on the issues in the required time. Therefore, it is not advisable based on the experiences in the present study to limit, but rather to extend the time for reflections as unconscious matters take time to become conscious. In the present study, emphasis was put on nodding and positive body language rather than on posing questions to informants. The aim was to communicate that the informant's reflections and all that comes to mind were the 'right' ones. The conclusion drawn was that this approach was also appreciated by the informants.

The study showed that it was relatively easy to get access to and reveal the consumers' image heritage of the case company. Informants reported feelings of joy and enthusiasm during their 'memory and image journey.' Especially the young informants who wrote accounts appreciated the opportunity to associate freely and quite many learned something about themselves during the process. Thus the method provided an opportunity to 'dig deeper' into the unconscious through introspection.

I'm so surprised! How can my image be so different for Kodin Anttila and Anttila? I have never realized how differently I think about the two departments and that my images are so contradictory (Mikko, 48, I).

Writing about Anttila was a nice assignment. It is surprising, how many different things are associated with one name. Furthermore, it is strange to notice that they stem from so many years. And how much easier it is to write in a stream of consciousness when not being tied up to a specific pattern for thinking, like for example, to think about Anttila's marketing communications. Seemingly small, insignificant things can be the roots of very significant thoughts (Tiina, 23, LD).

First we did an assignment on associations of Anttila and it was real fun! Oh, this endless stream of words that a genuinely Finnish company can create in a student. And how strong my image of the company is! I am aware of the image I tried to depict on paper is true, but now and then the image is more positive and I can even drop in there (Eva-Maria, 23, LD).

The study revealed that it is essential to develop a relaxed and open atmosphere both during the interviews as well as when writing accounts. The recollection of memories was found to be slow as some informants needed more than 30 minutes before they started to remember, for example, childhood experiences and other events in their youth.

However, some experienced the opposite, which means that it was nice to let thoughts fly and to write down things freely.

We are doing an exercise in associations and I notice that in the end of it, memories from my childhood from common shopping trips come to my mind. How refreshing for a change! (Anne, 27, LD).

Surprisingly many associations stem when you really concentrate. I'm just the kind of person who needs calm and thinking time before I can structure my thoughts, so many things became unwritten on the paper, but the result was probably what was expected. On the other hand, when thinking of Fournier's research, where the informant is interviewed for hours, this result was obviously the expected (Jutta, 31, LD).

We had a very nice assignment on Anttila. Exciting, how differently one writes about a company or whatever, when you get the assignment all of a sudden and you can write whatever you want without thinking of grammar or spelling or structure (Johanna, 25, LD).

Writing about Anttila was a nice assignment. It is surprising, how many different things are associated with one name. Furthermore, it is strange to notice that they stem from so many years. And how much easier it is to write in a stream of consciousness when not being tied up to a specific pattern for thinking, like for example, to think about Anttila's marketing communications. Seemingly small, insignificant things can be the roots of very significant thoughts (Tiina, 23, LD).

The method proved to be useful also when learning to know how one thinks about one's employer. Therefore, writing accounts can provide opportunities for research on organizational identity.

It was interesting to write about associations of Anttila as I have been working there for many years and have not really thought about it much earlier (Tuuli, 23, LD).

Hence, the informants appreciated the research design. The greatest advantage of the research design, consisting of interviews, writing accounts, group interviews and

learning diaries, was that it provided an opportunity to compare the various data gathering methods and to make conclusions about which method provides the richest data. In the present study, the richest data was gathered through interviews, but it can be noted that those informants belonged to the same age group as the interviewer, which might provide a natural setting between two persons of the same age. Additionally, the young informants were enthusiastic about the opportunity to write accounts on their own.

To summarize, the methodological conclusions drawn are that the grounded method chosen was well-suited for gaining access to how consumers' construct their corporate images over time as it is an especially suitable for process studies. Therefore, the present study can be used to conduct and develop further studies both by scholars and practitioners on image heritage. The method is more accessible than complex memory methods developed lately (see e.g. Braun-La Tour, La Tour et al. 2007). This can be seen as a methodological contribution as it serves further image heritage studies.

### **5.3. The managerial perspective of the study**

Most practitioner-oriented branding books published in the 2000's emphasize that consumers have changed due to, for example, technological developments, namely the internet and new ways of consumption. Additionally, they emphasize that strong corporate images are one of the most valuable monetary assets for the company. Therefore, to 'produce' the right images, or "seductions skills" as Olin's (2005, 8) calls them, becomes ultimately important for companies in the increasingly complex world (Keller 2008). At the same time, an 'understanding of the mind of the market' (Zaltman 2003) is in its infancy. We do not yet know enough about consumers and how they construct images, especially not to meet the requirements of those practitioners who recognize that consumers' minds do not necessarily mirror the company's latest branding strategies. However,

The development of the discipline [marketing] is based on the attempt constantly to bring suitable contributions to companies in order to develop successful market approaches (Addis & Podestà 2005, 387).

Therefore, new understanding of how consumers construct corporate images that offers managers and practitioners concrete means for promoting their companies is needed. The present study meets that need and provides new understanding on the temporal dimension in consumers' corporate image construction. By investigating the consumers' image heritage the company can get such information that reveals the roots of its corporate images, based on which strategic relational approaches in branding can be developed. This approach has the potential to meet the requirements of a dialogue through enhanced consumer understanding.

#### **5.3.1. Conclusions, managerial implications and contribution**

An understanding of consumers' corporate image constructions as *dynamic relational processes* based on a *multifaceted network of images from multiple sources over time* challenges mainstream organization-focused views on branding as a way for companies

to manage and influence their corporate images. The findings in the present study clearly show that consumers' corporate images have a temporal dimension, namely, image heritage. To summarize, the conclusions are that images are dynamic relational processes and they may change, but they change in relation to all possible influences on the marketplace. Second, images are relational processes constructed in the interplay between the consumer, the company and other sources. Third, all this is done over time. Over time "only a fraction are retained, so those that are remembered hold meaning" (see Braun-La Tour, La Tour et al. 2007, 46). Therefore, the present study has implications for managers by contributing a new understanding of how the company's images are constructed in consumers' minds as dynamic relational processes over time.

As the temporal dimension, here conceptualized as image heritage, has not been discussed or analyzed in any branding models or consumer-focused views before, the discussion here will be based on the components of image heritage, namely:

- *The awareness time span* of the consumer's previous experiences in relation to the company out of which memories may stem,
- *The content of stored memories from multiple sources* to be activated for interpreting company-related experiences today
- *The temporal focus*, depicting concentration(s) of memory cues or stimuli on one specific or multiple era(s) in the company's history.

The dynamic relational process-oriented view of consumers' corporate image constructions from multiple sources over time indicates the following from a managerial perspective.

### **Image dynamics and change**

Images were found to be constructed in *dynamic relational processes* in interaction with and relation to other actors on the market. Therefore, images may change due to and in relation to changes in the market place, thus they are dynamic and have a temporal dimension.

Change emerged in the present study either due to consumer-related or company-related change and a distinction emerged due to how suddenly or slowly images changed.

Sudden consumer-related changes emerged when the person, for example, became employed by the company or by its owner, or the person's close relative became employed by the company. In the first case, the mental distance to the company also changed and became closer, whereas change in mental distance did not emerge in the case of a relative. However, the changes were due to a change in the perspective and relationship with the company and enhanced in this specific case the company's possibilities to influence the individuals' images directly or indirectly through the employer's network. Therefore, employers emerged to be important ambassadors of the company's identity providing possibilities for the company to relatively quickly influence consumers belonging to the employers' networks. The managerial

implications are to focus on internal marketing (branding) as an indirect way of influencing on consumers on the market place.

Additionally, sudden changes emerged when a consumer experienced something that strongly contrasted her/his expectations, like experiencing a new department store. However, the informants clearly separated one department store from another and also one section from another in the department store. Therefore, images were multiple and did not necessarily have transfer effects. In the present study the change was 'local.' Moreover, as the company's marketing communications hardly had got the consumers to recognize a department store's change of name, it becomes evident that although company actions may influence corporate images, it is not necessarily the latest efforts that influence, rather those that are relevant to the consumer may extend far back in time. The managerial implications are to be consumer-oriented and to focus on consumers' image heritage for uncovering important events for the consumer.

In the present study, informants' images changed slowly. Implications of this are twofold. First, although the company is in tune with the overall market changes, this did not influence much the informant's basic view of the company. On the contrary, the temporal focus for interpreting company actions was often in the past and due to something the informant had experienced which override later experiences. Therefore, a temporal focus gap emerged between the company and the consumer. The implications are that company actions are interpreted with 'outdated templates' from the company's perspective. Moreover, in traditional branding literature the view of time is linear, whereas based on the study in consumers' image construction processes past, present and future emerged to be present 'at the same time'.

In conclusion, consumers have a memory and do remember earlier experiences with the company and even over a long period of time. In the present study, images were found to be constructed based on a network of previous experiences with multiple sources over time. Therefore, earlier company actions may be well remembered by the consumers, representing the consumer's image heritage, which may challenge the company's branding strategies if the influences of the company's past history are not analyzed. Therefore, the company is also responsible for earlier eras, its roots, not only the present time and the future. The managerial implications are to study the consumers' image heritage for reaching an understanding of what specific experiences have been important landmarks for the consumers in their image construction processes. Image heritage reveals the consumers' version of the company's history and critical incidents therein.

Consumers' image heritage invites the company into a dialogue that resonates with the consumer's image heritage. A dialogue is here understood apart from a monologue, as dialogues resonate and take the other part into consideration. Bernstein(1984) emphasized the role of dialogue already in his influential book from the 1980's. Although only a part of our 'inner world' is consciously experienced by us, traces from our memory can become conscious depending on the situation. Therefore, it is important that the company is aware of consumers' image heritage regarding the company as various memories can be activated and become the interpretation base for company actions. Image heritage is the foundation for a dialogue to develop and can



thus be a valuable resource for the company in its branding strategy. Nevertheless, it can also become a burden if not adequately considered.

**The ‘relational’** in images emerged based on two aspects. First, images were constructed based on a *multifaceted network of images from multiple sources*, within which the company was but one source, and second, the images were constructed based on experiences *over time*.

The multifaceted network of images from multiple sources positioned the company in the consumer’s mind in the marketplace through comparison and interactions with other actors and sources in the marketplace. Therefore, images are constructed in a relational manner. Managing this multifaceted network of images in consumers’ minds is out of reach for any company in today’s marketplace, but taking part as one of the influencers and actors is one of the objectives in branding. The present study and its findings challenge the company’s consumer-knowledge and the management’s ability to market-sensing, as it is important to recognize what in the past is present today in consumer image construction processes. Moreover, the role of the personnel as one of the sources for both the consumer’s corporate image constructions per se, as they often are involved when consumers experience ‘the company,’ but also as resources to collect consumer information, as it is believed that consumers reveal at least parts of their image heritage in various contacts with the company.

Puusa (2007) found in her study on organizational identities that the personnel’s temporal focus concerning the organization’s identity was in past and present times, whereas the management’s temporal focus was in the future. The temporal focus gap between the management and the personnel pinpoints, according to Puusa, the management’s ability to communicate and motivate the personnel for working for the organization’s future visions. Therefore, managerial implications internally are to focus on the personnel’s image heritage for creating a dialogue about the company’s identity and its future so that the personnel can bring the identities of their organizations to life in the course of their work (Topalian 2003). In a recent study with the aim to ascertain what managers believed were the core components of corporate identity Melewar and Karaosmanoglu (2006) found that most of the managers saw corporate history as a significant constituent of the corporate identity concept. This finding pinpoint according to the authors that various stakeholders’ perceptions of the organization take form over long periods of time through corporate behavior, communications and strategy as key elements of identity. Melewar and Karaosmanoglu’s findings are in the present study called the consumers’ image heritage. Therefore supports the present study of image heritage Melewar and Karaosmanoglu’s findings.

Images were constructed based on experiences over time. Pettigrew (1997) described relational processes as sequences of individual and collective events, actions, and activities unfolding over time in context. The traditional view in branding has focused on the consumer-company relationship as the main context for influence. However, the relational view indicates that images are constructed in a relational way as an ongoing process based on both company and consumer impact. In line with a process analyst’s task to “catch this reality in flight” (Pettigrew 1997, 338), the managerial implications from an image perspective is therefore to focus on analyzing and understanding all touch points between the consumer and the company as ‘moments of truth’ (Grönroos

2000). Consumers integrate all kinds of experiences in relation to the company over the years and also future expectations. It is difficult to predict what catches their attention and stick. For a company it can be a challenge to find the right kind of strategy to attract and communicate stakeholders who temporally focus, for example, on the 1970's in their image constructions. Managerial implications of image heritage is, however, to move from an organization-focused view of branding towards a consumer-focused view, which underlines that images are constructed in consumers' minds not by management decisions and that consumer-understanding and –knowledge should be the platform for branding strategies as the only means to catch the consumer's reality in flight.

In conclusion, the managerial implications are manifold but they can be crystallized into the need of consumer-orientation within branding grounded in a relational view on the consumer–company interplay.

Image heritage provides insight into the content of consumer memory, which is the basis for the consumer to interpret corporate communications and actions. Therefore, image heritage knowledge can be incorporated and used to help managers to build their branding strategies and communications both internally and externally. The findings also suggest the possibility for segmented communications strategies based on an image heritage temporal focus 'group' or based on landmark events. These landmark events may have symbolic meanings to consumers and form unrevealed 'brand communities.'

In sum, image heritage knowledge can help in articulating new value propositions that meet the image heritage of different consumer groups, which challenges the ability to listen, in the sense of hearing and understanding the consumer. This emphasizes the role of personnel as information sources for detecting possible temporal focus gaps between the organisation and the various consumer groups. Moreover, image heritage provides an opportunity to understand the company's history from the perspective of various publics.

The objective of image management is to produce an appealing picture of the company for various publics (employees, customers, shareholders, government, etc) and to position it in a beneficial way (Alvesson 1990, 166)

Therefore, *successful* image management requires knowledge on how these images are constructed in the various publics' minds, that is, 'image heritage management.' Thus, this study has managerial implications and contributes to the existing body of knowledge.

#### **5.4. Suggestions for further research**

Good grounded theory should be modifiable to new subjects and perspectives of the same problem (Glaser, 1992, 24).

The dynamic relational view of consumers' corporate image construction processes opens up a broad arena for further research within both the process-oriented consumer-focused and the organization-focused and managerially-oriented fields of corporate image research.

As suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967, 24), empirical generalizations of the findings, and especially of image heritage, can be made by comparing similarities and/or differences in these findings to other contexts of corporate image research, and hence generate properties of categories that increase the generality of the categories and explanatory power found in this research. Further research with the same research design, but in various business settings, contexts and among various audience groups (internal and external) is hence needed for furthering the understanding of the temporal dimension in image constructions. This may lead to establishing major uniformities and universals on how, on an individual level, memory and memories work as the basic element for constructing and reconstructing corporate images. Moreover, research on other levels of image construction than the corporate level may also enhance understanding on corporate level image construction and grounded modifications of the theory.

Image heritage opens up a broad scene for further research. As the concept has been developed with a grounded theory approach based on the collected data, the concept itself can be developed based on new data from other companies, other levels of images (person, product, employees and organizational identity, industry, profession, region, country, on the concept itself and in different business settings and contexts b2b, b2c, international and cultural).

As this study represents a novel approach for understanding corporate image constructions, manifold research opportunities emerge concerning

1. The choice of concept versus related concepts. Image/meaning/value
2. The choice of empirical context.
  - a. Retailing/other branches
  - b. Service brand, products
  - c. Other levels of image research (person/product/service vs. service logic/branch/place branding/nation branding)
3. The choice of research focus.
  - a. Consumer/customers/frequent customers/other stakeholder groups
4. The choice of business situations. Mergers and acquisitions
5. The choice of research approach. Other qualitative approaches and maybe quantitative ones

This study is focused on understanding consumers' image constructions and the temporal dimension therein. As pointed out earlier, the research fields within relationship management and service marketing have focused on the relationship between the consumer and the company since the 1970's. As Grönroos (2000) emphasizes, "taking a relationship approach, brands are seen as brand relationships, which are affected by a number of brand contacts that occur during an ongoing

relationship between the customer and the supplier or service provider” (ibid 285). Therefore, future branding and image heritage research is suggested to incorporate findings from the relationship management and service marketing research stream. As images have remained an understudied field within relationship management and services, the new understanding could provide valuable new insights for both branding and relationship management and service marketing.

Moreover, as was pointed out earlier in the discussion, image heritage provides valuable insights for marketing communications. Therefore, future studies should focus on enhancing the understanding of how image heritage understanding more precisely could be used in strategic marketing communications.

Finally, future research within consumer culture theory could focus on image heritage through other research methods like narrative approaches for enriching the understanding on image heritage.

In sum, several ideas for developing corporate image research towards relational ideas have been introduced in the study. It looks evident that much is to be found in the Nordic School approach, in which the relational view has been the focus in research for three decades. Additionally, concerning the present study, the ideas for deepening the understanding of consumers’ image constructions and image heritage by focusing on details such as change and emotions, are many. In addition, ideas for moving on to new contexts for studying image heritage are many as it is challenging to develop the concept of image heritage further. In conclusion, it is hoped that image heritage and the dynamic relation view on consumers’ image construction processes will open up a new stream of research based on a dynamic relational view on the consumers’ image construction processes. Therefore, the study can be ended by referring to the words of Glaser and Strauss (1967), concerning their own study:

To summarize: the theorist’s task is to make the most of his insight by developing them into systematic theory. His sociological perspective is never finished, not even when he writes the last line of his monograph – not even after he publishes it, since thereafter he often finds himself elaborating and amending his theory, knowing more than when the research was formally concluded (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 256).

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## IMAGE HERITAGE *THE TEMPORAL DIMENSION IN CONSUMERS' CORPORATE IMAGE CONSTRUCTIONS*

Images and brands have been topics of great interest in both academia and practice for a long time. The company's image, which in this study is considered equivalent to the actual corporate brand, has become a strategic issue and one of the company's most valuable assets.

In contrast to mainstream corporate branding research focusing on consumer-images as steered and managed by the company, in the present study a genuine consumer-focus is taken. The question is asked: how do consumers perceive the company, and especially, how are their experiences of the company over time reflected in the corporate image? The findings indicate that consumers' corporate images can be seen as being constructed through dynamic relational processes based on a multifaceted network of earlier images from multiple sources over time. The essential finding is that corporate images have a heritage.

In the thesis, the concept of **image heritage** is introduced, which stands for the consumer's earlier company-related experiences from multiple sources over time. In other words, consumers construct their images of the company based on earlier recalled images, perhaps dating back many years in time. Therefore, corporate images have roots - an image heritage - on which the images are constructed in the present.

For companies, image heritage is a key for understanding consumers, and thereby also a key for consumer-focused branding strategies and activities. As image heritage is the consumer's interpretation base and context for image constructions here and now, branding strategies and activities that meet this consumer-reality has a potential to become more effective.

This thesis is positioned in the tradition of The Nordic School of Marketing Thought and introduces a relational dynamic perspective into branding through consumers' image heritage.

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